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THE CHALLENGE

OF

BARLETTA.

BY

MASSIMO D'AZEGLIO.

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH

BY

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BIBLIOTHE
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VOL. II.

LONDON:
W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE,
PALL MALL, S.W.

1880.

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251. f. 776.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY W. H. ALLEN AND CO.

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THE CHALLENGE

OF

BARLETTA.

CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING PIECE OF NEWS.

HERMIA.—

"Ah me! for pity! what a dream was there.
Lysander, look, how I do quake with fear!
Methought a serpent eat my heart away,
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey."

Midsummer Night's Dream.

AT the sound of the trumpet, Correa appeared armed with a battle-axe and small round buckler, to answer Bayard's defiance. The latter changed to a fresh horse, and prepared for the combat.

The two adversaries no longer approached at full gallop, but, by timely use of spur and bit, kept their chargers in a canter till they were almost within reach of one another. In this contest, speed was of no avail (as in running a tilt) to increase the impetus of the shock. The efficacy of the blows depended much more on vigour of arm, and also, in a great measure, on knowing how to manage the horse, so as to make it rear up when in full career; the moment of its beginning to drop down again on its fore legs was chosen by the knight to deal the blow, which he usually tried to deliver on his foe's helmet; and when this was done in time, the shock was almost irresistible.

At the first encounter, the horses, well trained and handled, rose and fell together, so that the warriors, covered by their shields, were unable to hit one another, and passed on. The same thing happened at their next meeting. Bayard, having learnt his adversary's

tactics, charged the third time with greater impetuosity, obliging Correa to do the same; but when they were almost face to face, the Frenchman, all at once, pulled his horse back on its haunches, at the very moment that his antagonist, not expecting such a manœuvre, had made his rear, with the intention of delivering his blow; but he came down again without having been able to do so. Bayard seized his opportunity with incredible rapidity, raised his axe with both hands, gave a prick with the spurs, and, standing up in his stirrups, dealt such a splitting blow on Correa's helmet that it felled him on to his horse's neck; when instead of lifting up his head again, as the spectators expected, he fell stunned to the ground, and was borne by his squires out of the arena.

Bayard also made his exit, saluting Donna Elvira's balcony, amidst the plaudits of the whole amphitheatre, and triumphal notes of victory. However, he soon had to return and

fight Azevedo, who came forward and offered to carry out the terms of the challenge in his comrade's stead. The combat was of longer duration, and attended with more varied fortunes; but finally, the French cavalier was adjudged to have the best of it.

Outside, in a railed-in enclosure near the entrance into the amphitheatre, accommodation had been provided for the horses and servants of the knights who meant to fight. There Consalvo had provided all requisites, such as several tables on which to deposit their arms; a smith with a portable forge, in case it should be necessary to repair any of their armour; and lastly, a buffet with a plentiful supply of wine and provisions. It was Brancaleone's office to see that nothing was wanting, and that all needful services were rendered. While he was attending to these duties, Grajano d'Asti (whom he recognised from having seen him when, together with Fieramosca, he bore the cartel to the French camp) arrived with

two squires carrying his arms and leading his war-horse. Brancaleone, who, up to this time, had, as usual, been very sparing of his words, went forward to meet him, and received him with much more effusion than he generally evinced to strangers. Anyone tolerably intimate with him might have seen at once, from his *empressement* on this occasion, that some secret motive prompted him to enter into conversation with this champion. In fact, he *had* an object in view, and an important one, as will be seen in its proper place.

After the first greetings and offer of services, when he had supplied everything that was required, he stopped to talk, while Grajano's squires were assisting him to divest himself of his rich attire, in order to don a leathern doublet and hose tight to the skin; over these fitted his splendid suit of armour of burnished steel streaked with gold. It was laid out in pieces on a table. Brancaleone looked it all over, bit by bit, with the closest attention;

taking the breast-plate in his hand, to help buckle it on the knight, he observed that it was made with two plates of steel, and he judged it to be impenetrable. The cuirass was double, and of equal strength. He took up the armlets, cuishes, and greaves, and being well versed in such matters, he knew they would stand the severest test.

While engaged in these investigations, a sagacious observer might have noticed a curious expression to flit across his face, and a peculiar smile to hover about his mouth; but at that moment no one was paying any attention to him.

At last, nothing but the helmet remained to be put on. Brancaleone, taking it up and examining it, perceived that it did not correspond in goodness to the rest. He asked Grajano whether he never wore a cap or iron head-piece under it; and on his answering in the negative, inquired why, using such stout armour for the rest of his body, he did

not take equal precautions to protect his head.

"Because," replied Grajano, "at the assault on a miserable little castle, worth three farthings, and which, out of sheer obstinacy, that fool the Duc de Montpensier would insist on taking, just as I had planted a ladder to scale the wall, one of those Abruzzi rustics who were defending it let a stone fall on my head; it not only battered in my helmet, but made a hole in my head, which, I expect, will never close entirely till a spadeful of earth is thrown over it. Just look here!"

So saying, he took hold of Brancaleone's hand, and, raising it to his head, made him feel a dent in the middle of his skull, which, it was quite evident, would have prevented him wearing any heavier casque.

"That wound—hang the clown who gave it me!—cost me many a good ducat, for I was obliged to leave King Charles, and stop several months in Rome to get cured. True," he

added, laughing, "on that occasion I got rid of the encumbrance of a wife . . . so there was some good mixed up with the evil. Then I entered into the pay of that wretch Valenza; and at last, as fate willed it, I returned to the French. In their service, at least, it neither rains nor snows, and at the end of every month they pay down their florins just as regularly as the Martelli bank in Florence."

"But this helmet," pursued Brancaleone, "how would it stand a violent blow?"

"Oh, that does not trouble me in the least," answered the other. "In the first place, it is Damascus steel of the finest temper; and then I must tell you that, in battle, when I see anyone whose aim seems to be to drive the flies away from my head, I bring my buckler at once into play, and he must be an active man that can touch me. See," (and he showed him the buckler and strap with which it was attached to his neck,) "see how long I hold it, so as to have my arm free."

Brancaleone said nothing further; again thoroughly inspected the helmet, turned it round on all sides, and made it ring, by tapping it in a peculiar manner with his knuckles; then opened, and fitted it on to the knight's head.

In the meantime the three Spaniards and Bayard had been engaged, with the before-mentioned results. The latter, after his victory, approached Grajano just as he had finished arming and was about to mount his horse. The Astigian knight paid him some compliments, and then, seeing that Brancaleone was not attending to what they were saying, asked him his opinion of the adversaries' powers.

Bayard took off his helmet and iron gauntlets, laid them on the table, wiped the dew from his brow, and said:

"*Don Diego de Ayala, bonne lance, foy de chevalier.*"

To the others he also accorded the praise he considered their meed; and gave the war-

rior who was going forth to fight some hints as to his strategy, which were not thrown away on him.

Grajano entered the arena well mounted on a large mulberry-coloured steed, covered with an orange caparison, and a herald proclaimed his name aloud; after which he rode below Consalvo's box, and struck Inigo's and Azevedo's shields three times with his lance. An involuntary shiver coursed through every fibre of Fieramosca's being, as he heard that name pronounced. He felt fresh qualms of conscience at having withheld from Ginevra the knowledge that her husband was alive; and according to the usual practice of mankind, always to make good resolutions the more readily as the time for their execution is the more remote, so he again determined to reveal everything to her at the first opportunity.

Meanwhile, fighting recommenced. The Piedmontese warrior, who was reckoned among the foremost in the point of robustness and dex-

terity in the use of arms, obtained a decisive advantage over Azevedo, though he could not succeed in unhorsing him. Likewise, he so bore his part in his joust with Inigo, that the judgment of everyone was given in his favour. After him, several Frenchmen tried their fortunes. Le Sieur de la Palisse, Chandenier, Aubigné, and La Mothe who, excited by the dispute he had had with Diego Garcia about the bull-fight, on that day performed prodigies.

To tell the truth, the three Spaniards, who had undertaken to take the field, were getting the worst of it; and, ere long, perceived that they three, alone, would be unequal to the task of holding their ground against the best swordsmen of the French army. However, Inigo and Azevedo still kept their seats; and Grajano, who had already encountered them once, returned again to the charge. Perhaps their exhaustion from the oft-recurring struggle partly stood him in good stead; however

that may be, he was fortunate enough to overthrow them one after the other, and so was declared to have carried off the honours of the joust. He received the rich helmet, the victor's prize, from the hands of Donna Elvira, amidst the flourish of music and universal acclamations.

At this conclusion of the fête Consalvo rose, and, with his daughter, the Captain of France and all the nobility returned to the Castle, where, dinner-hour being near at hand, preparations were in progress for the banquet. The piazza and amphitheatre were soon emptied of spectators, who all, both townspeople and strangers, repaired, respectively, to their homes or to taverns (Veleno's, as being close at hand, was the most patronised) to dine and talk over the varied fortunes of the tournament.

On the morning of this day, when Fortune had such cruel buffets in store for her, Ginevra woke an hour later than usual. Troubled,

more than ever, in her mind, she had, only towards daybreak, fallen into an uneasy slumber disturbed by a succession of fantastic visions. At one time Fieramosca appeared to her wounded, with his dying eyes bidding her a last farewell. Another time, she fancied she saw him surrounded by barons, victorious and covered with glory; turning his glance contemptuously away from her, and letting it light on another woman to whom he gave his right hand. In her very sleep she said, to reassure herself, "What a happy thing for me it is only a dream!" Still a tremor seized her, for she seemed even to hear the festive sounds which celebrated his nuptials; the clashing of bells and discharge of artillery. At last, the noise smote so acutely on her ear, that she woke with a start, opened her eyes, turned them towards the balcony from which Barletta was visible, and became aware that, if the rest were a dream, the noise, at any rate, was a reality. She sat up in her bed, with-

drew from below the quilt a tiny rounded foot white as milk, concealed it in a slipper while she put on a blue dress over her chemise, and tossed her long chesnut tresses, with both hands, behind her ears.

She sat down on the balcony under the vines, gazing, with eyes dazzled by the light from a pure and unclouded sky, at the majestic panorama which opened out before her.

The sun, already two hours risen, was illuminating the opposite coast, town, and Castle. Midway between the towers and red galleries appeared, every now and then, sudden puffs of pearl-grey smoke, athwart which darted swift tongues of fire, and which gleamed in the solar ray with a white sheen, as they gyrated in the air, finally rising and disappearing in the blue empyrean. Some seconds later, the report, booming over the waves, was heard reverberating along the cliffs on the shore, and gradually died away in a distant echo among

the most remote mountain gorges. The Castle and town (temporarily veiled by smoke that was soon dissipated by the sea breeze) were reflected in the azure tint of the ocean, which was so calm that their reversed image was perfectly mirrored on its slightly rippled surface. The sounds of the bells and music arrived more or less loud or faint according to the force of the wind; and even, at times, the acclamations of the populace, who were cheering the Spanish Captain, could be heard in the quiet of the Convent.

But neither these signs of rejoicings, nor the smiling picture under her eyes, availed to banish from Ginevra's spirits the melancholy which oppressed her. To the stings of conscience was now added another equally terrible; viz. the suspicion that she was being betrayed by the man for whose sake she had made the immense sacrifice of disobedience to the voice of duty and conscience. It was a doubt which her mind rejected, which her heart abhorred;

nevertheless, it is for those to say who have undergone a like trial, whether, the doubt having once arisen, it was an easy matter to dispel it. Truth to tell, if so be her fears were entirely groundless, diverse circumstances combined to lend them an air of probability. Ettore, certainly, had contrived to conceal his meeting with Grajano; but accustomed as he was to be open with her in everything, he failed to blind her to the fact that he was in possession of a secret which he would not impart to her. Besides this harrowing idea, Zoraide's altered manner was as a thorn she could not pluck out of her heart. "How can I be sure," she thought, "that Ettore has not seen through it too? what certainty have I that he does not care for her?" and when she tried to draw some conclusion from these arguments, she lost herself in a labyrinth of doubts, to extricate herself from which she held no clue.

Harassed in mind, she got up to try and find someone to talk to, and distract her

thoughts. She looked for Zoraide, but she was not in the house. She went down to the garden; she was not there either. She made inquiries among the few who remained behind in the Convent; no one knew where she was. She felt a tightening sensation at her heart, and a thousand undefined suspicions crowded into her mind. While making these researches she found herself near the tower which defended the entrance to the island. She saw that it was deserted, and not one man even on guard. As soon as the Constable's back was turned, one after another had gone off to enjoy the fêtes. She passed over the bridge and walked some distance along the beach; having on her right hand the sea, and on her left the slope of the mountain clothed with thick scrub. She walked along slowly, her mind too preoccupied to pay attention to anything happening around her. All at once she was startled by a noise which she heard among the bushes, and it was with a feeling of alarm

that she saw a man emerge from them. Hardly able to stand, covered with bloody rags, lacerated by the briars, and with long tangled hair tumbling about his face, he fell on his knees at her feet. Her first impulse was to flee; but being bold and courageous, she stood her ground, and, scrutinising the individual who had so strangely appeared before her, she, by degrees, recognised the bandit chief Pietraccio, whom, by Don Michele's contrivance, she and Fieramosca had involuntarily helped to escape. It all happened as Valentino's agent had foreseen. Pietraccio, while they were trying to restore the woman, had seized the opportunity to run up the stairs and through the door. Having gained his liberty by wresting a poniard from the guard who barred his passage, he succeeded, by his agility, though wounded and pursued, in reaching a place of safety by plunging into the adjacent thickets. To avoid falling into the hands of those on the look-out for him, he was obliged

to lurk about, on a miserable subsistence, in the deepest recesses of the wood; and now, accidentally coming across Ginevra who inspired him with no fear, as he believed he owed his liberty to her, impelled by hunger and exhaustion, he appealed to her for succour, by signs intended to make her comprehend his misery which was only too apparent in his general aspect. She felt both pity and repulsion for the poor wretch; soothed him with assurances that there was no one in the Convent but nuns, and, the tower being unguarded, that he might go with her and she would hide him in a wood-shed beneath her little house, and bring him refreshment. The assassin, who perhaps thought death preferable to such an existence, followed her, and, unseen by any, reached his hiding place, where the compassionate lady took him food, bandaged up his wound which, though slight, still required dressing, and provided him with straw for a bed.

Ginevra entered her house just as Zoraide and Gennaro returned from Barletta. She could not resist tenderly reproaching the girl for having gone without saying anything about it to her.

"My dear Zoraide, I have been feeling most anxious about you, not finding you anywhere about the island. Why did you not tell me you were going?"

"In order not to wake you," answered Zoraide; and the insincerity of this reply tinged her cheeks with a slight blush which did not escape Ginevra's eyes; then she continued: "I started early with Gennaro, and" . . .

"And," said Ginevra, smiling, "did you not know yesterday that you wished to go to the tournay?"

This direct question added a shade of annoyance to Zoraide's face, and she answered shortly:

"Yes . . . I had a sort of idea of it." . . .

Then resuming her interrupted thread of speech: "For a long time past I have been desirous of seeing one of those tournaments, so as to judge if they were really so superior to the Arab games. But goodness me! what knights and nobles do here would be performed by slaves; and not one of our chiefs would expose his life to amuse three or four thousand of the vulgar herd."

Ginevra, perceiving that Zoraide, in order to avoid further explanations on the subject of her expedition, wanted to discuss the tournament, did not care to press the point, and said:

"Was it a fine sight on the whole?"

"Fine? I should just think so!" struck in Gennaro who was dying to play the part of historian. He began with Consalvo's first entrance, describing, as well as he could, the pomp and pageantry of the barons; then, with the idea of saying something agreeable to her, he added, shaking his head and pursing up his

lips, while he twisted his cap round and round between his hands: "And if you could have seen your brother! how well he looked mounted on that splendid silver grey colt! everybody was saying, 'What a handsome young man!' and sooth to say, he was a perfect picture, in that blue mantle of yours. I was nearly crushed to death by the crowd in following the cavalcade outside the gate. Good elbows were needed, I can tell you! . . . yes, indeed . . . but when Consalvo's daughter left her litter, she was as far from me as you are; and Signor Ettore put her on horseback . . . that is, I ought to say, she rested one foot on his knee, —a tiny foot like that—look!" (And to show its size he extended the thumb of his right hand, pointing to its juncture with the wrist with the fore-finger of his left.) "Up she sprang, nimble as a cricket; and do you know what I can tell you? She must have been rather taken with your brother; for when she was in the saddle she said something sweet to

him, and made him a most enchanting little pout. I noticed that he quite blushed. Goodness only knows what they said to one another! And I thought to myself—mark my words!—Signor Ettore will be thinking of marrying. They would be a fine couple, I can tell you; they look made for one another."

It may be imagined how agreeable these comments must have been to Ginevra! Feeling them unbearable, and anxious to shake off her tormentor, she said shortly:

"Yes, yes! . . . you shall tell me all about it another time." And she turned to go away to her rooms with Zoraide; but Gennaro, whose tongue was now in full swing, would not leave her, and continued:

"Eh! and that 's just nothing at all! You should have seen him afterwards at the tournay, in the nobles' box. He sat next her the whole time, and they did nothing else but talk. Signora Zoraide can tell you, too, if everybody was not passing remarks on them; indeed, the

landlord of the 'Sun,' who provides the Castle with wine, said that her father is quite satisfied that she should marry him. That would be a fine thing for him, you know. How many thousands of beautiful ducats! Rather better than roughing it on horseback through rain and wind!"

Ginevra, to put a stop to this gossip, which stung her to the quick, though quite alive to its folly, said:

"But the tournament! what about the tournament?"

"Oh, the tournament! there has been nothing equal to it in Barletta, within the memory of man."

Then beginning with the bull-fight and Don Garcia's prowess, he went on to describe the tilting and other passages of arms, repeating all the names that had been proclaimed by the heralds. His memory served him only too well. He wound up by saying:

"The champion who finished the fête, by

unhorsing the three Spaniards, one after the other, was Don Grajano d'Asti."

"Who? who?" gasped Ginevra, with a change of voice and face she was unable to control.

"A certain Signor Don Grajano d'Asti. He must be a great baron; he was so splendidly dressed and armed."

"Grajano d'Asti did you say? Tall? short? young? What was he like?"

Gennaro (upon whom not a single item had been lost, connected with the arms, visage, and appearance of each combatant, and who retained a lively recollection of Grajano's face, as entering the field with his vizor raised he had exposed it to public view) was able to describe him so minutely, that the lady could no longer entertain a doubt that he was really her husband. She, however, kept her presence of mind sufficiently to conceal, in some measure, the tumult which was running riot in her heart, and to recognise the necessity of avoid-

ing detection. While Gennaro was doing his best to enlighten her as to the baron's form and features, she had leisure to recover her composure; and observing that her two listeners had been struck with her exclamation on hearing his name, in order to allay suspicion, she said, when the gardener stopped talking:

"You need not be surprised that his name startled me. Once upon a time there was some misunderstanding between him and my family; but afterwards it was all made up, and years ago all cause of offence ceased. However, the last thing I expected was to find him in French pay in Barletta."

So saying, she turned to go to her rooms, without, however, having succeeded in blinding Zoraide and Gennaro, who gathered, from the shifting colour of her face, that there was some deep private cause for her agitation. They, therefore, refrained from following her; and when she was gone, the gardener said to the damsel:

"Is she ill? or have I said anything wrong?"

Zoraide, whose thoughts were running in a different direction, and who yet could not exactly define her ideas and suspicions, responded with a shrug of her shoulders, and went away, no less anxious than Ginevra for solitude. Gennaro, left behind with his cap in his hand, took himself off about his business, muttering: "They are all alike! It takes a clever man to understand them."

Meanwhile, Ginevra went up a small staircase towards her room, but at every step she felt as though the whole world were weighing her down. She panted for breath, and her heart beat so violently that she almost swooned. Incessantly she murmured, "Blessed Virgin, help me!" and as her faintness increased, she could only moan, "My God! my God!" At length, so great was her prostration, that her knees tottered, and she was obliged to sit down on the fourth or fifth step which she had with

difficulty reached; while with a broken, hurried respiration, her forehead moist with the dew of anguish, she gasped, "By to-morrow morning I shall be dead!"

Although she had heard Zoraide go by a different way to her room and shut herself in, and though she knew that the nuns had all retired to rest in their cells during the hot noonday hours, yet the bare notion of being found here, in such a state, gave her the greatest uneasiness; so, to avoid that risk, she gave up her intention of going up any higher towards her room, and resolved to go instead through the cloister-wicket to the Church, where she felt that, henceforth, she ought alone to seek for help and defence against the evils which menaced her. So she made the best of her way there, now groping along the wall, now making every effort to walk as usual whenever she saw a lay sister passing along the passages, or a nun peeping out of her window.

There was no one in the Church. She threw herself down on the nearest step of the choir, and sat for some time with her head between her hands, and her elbows on her knees, to recover her self-possession; her mind, the while, in such a whirl, that she could not properly be said to have any distinct idea present to it.

Behind the high altar, eight or ten marble steps led into a subterranean chapel, where five silver lamps burnt, day and night, before an image of the Virgin painted, as everyone believed, by St. Luke. The miracles reported to have been performed on this spot, led to the erection on it of the Church and Convent. The place was in the form of a hexagon, and on the opposite side to the staircase stood the altar and image. At each angle, a column, sculptured with luxuriant foliage after the antique, supported one of the groins of the vault, the keystone of which bore a strong resemblance to a millstone, and had an aperture

in the centre about two feet across, closed by a grating, and opening into the Church before the predella of the high altar. A subtle ray of sunshine penetrated through the stained glass of one of the large windows in the dome, and passed through the aperture into the subterranean chapel.

It streamed down, forming a molecular beam through the darkness which was but faintly lit up by the red glimmer of the lamps, and reproduced, on the pavement, the colours of the panes of glass and shape of the grating. Ginevra went and knelt down at the foot of the altar, and as she passed through the beam, the light, reflected from her blue dress, all at once irradiated the chapel like a flash of lightning.

She began to pray, with her hands tightly clasped across her bosom, and eyes riveted on the picture. By degrees her pulses began to throb less violently, and her breathing became calmer. Her prayers, which found expression

not so much in words as in the dumb outpourings of her heart, gradually restored her to composure.

In common with all those ancient images, the face of that Madonna shadowed forth such divine and august sadness, that it imparted to the poor stricken creature a comforting sense of sympathy with her grief. Even as she gazed, she persuaded herself she saw the eyes flash; and awe-struck though she was, derived therefrom no little consolation.

"Holy and glorious Virgin," she pleaded, in tones of touching pathos, "who am I, to deserve Thy pity? but whom have I but Thee to be my stay? Here, at Thy feet, I pour forth my sorrows. Thou seest that this trial is beyond my strength; that if left to myself, I must sink under it. Oh, pitiful Virgin, infuse into my heart power to do Thy will!"

Thus she remained for some time with her eyes fixed on the picture, shedding, the while, tears which bathed her cheeks and bosom,

commending herself to the protection of the Mother of Consolation, and realising the blessing of being able to turn to Heaven, when all, even Hope itself, is lost here below.

She recalled to mind all the past hours of her life; the innocent joys of her infancy, the affections of her girlhood, the first words of love she had heard, the first remorse she had felt, and all the mingled yarn of woes and troubles which had befallen her since her marriage; she reviewed her latter years in all their bearings—a perpetual ringing the changes between rare pleasures (and they far from unalloyed ones), ever-recurring vexations, and bitter remorse. Now as a climax, as though awakening from a long dream, there seemed to vanish the certainty, with which she had so long buoyed herself up, that Ettore never would change towards her. And, while tottering under these rude shocks, helplessly wavering, yet well disposed to follow the voice of God, lo! now the Divine Will speaking in still

louder tones, and by the unexpected revelation to her of her husband's existence, almost placing her, by force, in the path of duty.

"Every doubt," she reflected, "is now removed. As long as I could believe him to be dead, perhaps there was some excuse for me; but now, miserable creature that I am, dare I pursue the same course?"

Here a fresh unforeseen difficulty occurred to her. "And when I present myself before him, and he asks me, 'Where have you been till now?'"

The answer was not easy to find. Struck by this notion, it seemed so absolutely impossible to resolve on braving her judge's scrutiny, that she quite gave up the idea at once, and racked her brain to find some other path out of the maze. But the more she considered, the plainer it appeared to her, that the step for which she felt such repugnance was precisely the only one which she either could or ought to take. "Of whom can I complain? Of no

one but myself. If I had behaved otherwise, and as I ought, I should not have incurred this bitter humiliation; and the longer I delay, the more bitter it will become."

Ginevra was naturally endowed with a strong mind, the very reverse of irresolute; so she concluded with a flash of spirit: "Can I live for ever a prey to such remorse? No! Can I reject the hopes and quell the terrors of another life? A thousand times no! Then duty must be done at any cost. The anguish which will be my lot must be the expiation of my errors; and Thou, divine Madonna, will take pity on me in this life and the next. If Grajano will not forgive, at the worst, what can he do to me? Kill me? My immortal soul would then fly to God, offer fruits of repentance, and obtain mercy and pardon."

After one final fervent prayer, she went up into the Church with a firm and rapid step (almost as though expecting thereby to nerve

herself for the task), passed out, and shut herself into her room, to think over the best way of putting her plan into execution. She sat down, as was her habit, on the balcony looking towards Barletta, and began to consider. This day was the easiest of any she could conceive for rejoining her husband, with the certainty of finding him at the fêtes in the Castle which she could reach in half an hour by sea. If, on the other hand, she were to await his return to the French camp, the difficulties in the way would be much greater. So she concluded: "There is no doubt about it. I must be with him before to-morrow. . . . But what shall I do about Ettore? He will be sure not to come to-day; shall I wait for him? I cannot. Leave the island, and desert him without his knowing what has become of me? after owing my life to him!" Thereupon she came to a determination worthy only of a mind like her own. "If," thought she, "when I leave him, I let him know how much it goes to my heart

to do so, I am only too sure he will never be happy again as long as he lives. If, on the contrary, I go away without telling him the reason, he will think of me as an ungrateful wretch, and my memory will soon be blotted out from his heart." The mere thought of this was more than she could bear; and sighing, she murmured, "My sins are great; but these penalties are too horrible."

With the restlessness attendant on strong mental agitation, she rose, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand, and began to put together the few things which she thought of taking with her. Looking through a chest, she came upon some shreds of Fieramosca's blue cloak, and the remains of the silver thread with which it was embroidered. The reader may picture to himself Ginevra's emotions at this sight. Her first impulse was to take them away with her, but quickly replacing them, she sighed, "No! every thought of him must be put aside, now and for ever. It ought to suffice

me, here below, to know that I have been the means of making him happy."

She wrote to the Abbess, thanked her in a few words for the hospitality shown her, and commended her friend to her good offices. She told her that an urgent summons obliged her to depart without taking leave, and that she trusted to be, ere long, in a position to give a clearer account of her circumstances.

This task completed, there was nothing more to be done at the Convent; but she would not start before evening. About an hour of daylight still remained. She sat down to wait patiently for nightfall. It was the most harrowing way she could have chosen to pass away the time. If she looked round the room, the sight of the little parcel she had placed on the table, and which she was going to take with her on her heartrending journey, conjured up a vivid anticipation of the vexations in store for her. If her eyes wandered towards the bed, made up as usual by the lay sister, it

occurred to her that she had entered it for the last time the previous night, and no one could tell where she would sleep the following one. Beyond the balcony it was worse still. She saw the strip of sea which separated her from the Castle of Barletta, and she remembered how often she had strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of Fieramosca's bark, appearing like a dark speck on the waters which it was now her turn to cross, and which would lead—Whither?

CHAPTER II.

THE BANQUET.

"'Twas now the merry hour of noon,
And in the lofty arched hall
Was spread the gorgeous festival.
* * * * * *
Round go the flasks of ruddy wine
From Bordeaux, Orleans, or the Rhine;
Their tasks the busy sewers ply,
And all is mirth and revelry."

Lay of the Last Minstrel.

While Ginevra, in this state of anguish, longed for, yet dreaded, the shades of night, Pietraccio, hidden in the wood-shed below her rooms, was impatiently and suspiciously looking out

for her; in hopes that, when evening came, she would point out to him some means of escaping unobserved.

The window, which lighted it from above, was level with the ground, and opened out on to a deserted plot behind the Convent, overgrown with thorns and nettles; altogether, an improbable place of resort for anybody. The bandit became alarmed at the sound of footsteps approaching through the briars; and his fears still further increased on seeing a man, whom he recognised, stop close to the window. It was the Constable of the tower. He would have cowered down behind a bundle of faggots, but fearful lest the dry leaves should betray him, he stood rooted to the spot, holding in his breath, and thus heard distinctly all that passed between the Constable and the man who was with him.

"Up there," began Martin, "that window on the first story, where there is a cage with a flower-pot. You see it would be quite easy

to get up by the bars of the window on the ground floor, even without a ladder. Well . . . when you are up, you will find yourself in a passage with several doors—but mind you remember, the first to the left is Madonna's room. There is no one else living in the strangers' quarters. At the first hour of the night, all the nuns retire to bed. If you set about it properly, you will be here by three o'clock, have carried off the foreign lady, and be a mile away at sea before anyone troubles his head about you. I will shut up the dogs. I have given my men leave of absence; so anyone who wants them to-night will have to hunt them up throughout the inns of Barletta. Now I have done my part; but mind you tell your devil of an accomplice to take heed what he is about, for I have no idea of losing the Abbess's provision for the sake of those few florins; so be careful! for if the business turns out badly, I have already arranged for throwing the blame on your shoulders, and making

myself safe. I am fair and open with you, dear friends."

Boscherino, to whom this discourse was addressed, gave the Constable's moustaches a gentle tug, and answered, shaking his head:

"You would have to reach very high to throw the blame on my employer's shoulders, and it would take a longer arm than yours to do it. You may thank St. Martin that the rock of Barletta is some way off, and that someone, who is there, cannot hear you; for, I can tell you, he would soon make you laugh the wrong side of your face. Take my advice, mate! whether this affair turns out well or badly, the less you say about it the better for yourself."

Martin, who had been at the dinner given by Consalvo in Barletta, had drunk so much that he felt as bold as a lion; so, noways dismayed, he made reply:

"And I repeat that I am not in the least afraid of him; and that if I have stretched a

point to oblige you, I have only done so because soldiers often do one another a good turn, and not for the sake of those paltry ducats; and I do not feel in the slightest degree inclined to break my neck, or lose my bread, for strangers; so I tell you plainly. Look out for yourselves, for if you are discovered, I know how to exculpate myself; and as for the author of this enterprise, be he who he may, as long as I am in my tower, I can set him at defiance. So now we understand one another. Adieu!"

So saying, he went off towards the tower, leaving Boscherino at leisure to inspect the place. The latter looked after him with a compassionate smile, and ejaculated, in a sufficiently loud voice for Pietraccio to hear:

"Poor ass! Beware how you pit yourself against Cesar Borgia! It is ill playing with edged tools. Truly, Alicante wine makes men talk big."

These last words, no less than the preceding

dialogue, had been listened to by the bandit with the closest attention. They sufficed to acquaint him with the fact that, at the instigation of Valentino, a plot was afoot to carry off his protectress, and that the Duke was in the fortress of Barletta. Without doing Pietraccio any injustice, we may well believe that his first thought was not to defend the lady. What did he know about gratitude? But the hope of being able to defeat the plans of his own and his mother's greatest enemy, added to the more atrocious one of falling on and killing him in the crowd and confusion of the fêtes, made his blood boil with savage joy; and when Boscherino, shortly afterwards, took his departure, he left his hiding-place, and taking out of his bosom the small sharp dagger which Don Michele had given him, he tried the point with the end of his thumb, grinding his teeth, and putting himself into an attitude as though about to strike. Then he debated in what way he could reach Barletta safely.

The Convent bell sounded the *Ave Maria*. Half an hour later he crept up gently, opened the door and, looking round, saw that the esplanade was deserted; but to reach the mainland he did not dare to pass by the tower or bridge. Aware that the channel between the island and the shore offered him the safest route (it was about seventy yards wide), he went down the steps, reached the water, undressed, made a bundle of his clothes which he tied on his head, set off swimming, and in a few minutes reached the sands unseen and unheard. It was almost dark; so having hastily dried and dressed himself without attracting attention, he started off at a rapid pace towards the town.

Diego Garcia had hardly settled the question to which his astounding feat with the bull had given rise between himself and the French, when he recollected that he had received an important commission from Consalvo, and hastily left the amphitheatre. This was no less a

charge than to keep an eye on the preparations for the banquet which was to be given at the Castle. As time pressed, he made his way to the kitchen, and being still under the influence of the irritation caused by La Mothe's speech, he appeared among the cooks and domestics, who were preparing the viands, in a frame of mind by no means calculated to pass over any fault or inadvertence on the part of his underlings.

"And so," said he, stopping on the threshold with his arms crossed, "are you nearly ready? It wants rather less than an hour to dinner-time."

The head cook, a tall fat man, was standing at the large centre table spitting game, with the sulky air peculiar to his class in similar circumstances, even when everything is going on smoothly. He had, however, some reason to be in a rage, for fuel had run short; and besides that the meat would be spoilt in cooking, from his not being able to keep up a

regular heat, there was the still greater danger not only of not being ready in proper time, but also of having no dinner at all to send up, either good or bad; and anyone who knows how dear to the soul of a cook is his credit, may conceive the state of mind of the one to whom the Spaniard addressed his inquiry. At that moment the Pope himself might have gone without an answer, but there was no gainsaying Paredes.

He raised his head and brandished the spit, as he replied: "The Devil himself has been poking in his horns, Don Diego. The infernal Devil! That treacherous steward has left me short of wood. I sent off as many of these rascals as I could spare, to hunt about for some; but they must be all dead, for not one of them has come back." And he wound up his tale of grievances with the *groan*, or I should rather say *roar*, of one at his wits' end.

"Wood or no wood," raved Paredes, "I swear if you are not ready at the proper time

. . . *majadero, harto de ajos*" . . . and he went on hurling similar insulting epithets, in Spanish, at the devoted head of the cook, who ill brooking the abuse, retorted:

"Perhaps your Excellency will teach me how to cook meat without fire."

Don Garcia was not one of the strong who take umbrage because the weak prove themselves to be in the right; so although, at first, somewhat incensed at the cook's answer, he acknowledged to himself that the fault did not rest with him, and exclaimed:

"And where has the thief of a steward hidden himself?" Turning his back, without waiting for an answer, he ran up again into the courtyard, and shouted, in a voice of thunder: "Izquierdo! Izquierdo! you villain!"

Izquierdo had rushed off to the nearest wood-yard, and, assisted by the cook-boys, had laden some asses, and was driving them before him with blows, when, as he entered the court, he heard the voice calling him. He used his

stick with redoubled energy, so that the poor asses should come in for at least some part of the blame; and, goodness knows, they had little enough to do with it!

He began to make excuses as soon as he came within hearing of Paredes, but was interrupted by him:

"Come, be quick! less talking. Down with the logs, unless you want to feel them about your head."

Between the court and kitchen, three steps led up into a dark passage that ended in a small yard. In the middle was a walled-in open shaft. The descent was by a winding staircase, at the foot of which opened the kitchen door. Paredes stamped with impatience at the idea of the time it would take those men to carry the wood down in armfuls. Chafing at the slowness of the operation, in a fit of rage he stooped under one of the asses, lifted it up burden and all, grasped its fore and hind legs together, as though it were a kid,

carried it to the edge of the wall, and pitched it over all in a heap, the wood beneath and the ass above, with its legs in the air. Then returning with equal impetuosity to a second and third, he repeated the same exploit; so, in the confined space at the bottom, was to be seen a mountain of wood, together with the legs, ears, and muzzles of the unfortunate donkeys which, bruised and half-flayed, kicked so violently that the frightened boys had much ado to release them, unload the fuel, and carry it into the kitchen. Even the cook, infected with terror of Don Diego, came out and helped, keeping, however, a good look-out over his head, to see if another shower of asses were coming, so as to get out of the way in time. The grates were replenished in a trice, and so great was the impulse given, in this strange fashion, by Paredes, that every man did the work of three. As soon as he had satisfied himself that all was going on swimmingly, shaking off the dust and still grumbling, he

betook himself home to dress, and found the great court filled with the party which was just returning from the tournament. Consalvo, the Duc de Nemours, the lords and ladies, had arrived in time to see the last of the donkeys hoisted on his shoulders; and after hearing how matters stood, they all, laughing and joking, gave the *pas* to the Spanish baron, and proceeded themselves to the rooms prepared for the fêtes, where they remained till dinner-time.

Round the entrance hall, which was about a hundred paces in length and gave access to Consalvo's apartments, had been set out a large horse-shoe table capable of accommodating about three hundred guests. At the end furthest removed from the door, and at the top of the convex part of this table, were placed four velvet arm-chairs with gold fringe for the Duc de Nemours, Consalvo, Donna Elvira, and Vittoria Colonna. Overhead, there hung from the ceiling the gonfalons of Spain, the banners

of the house of Colonna, and the flags of the army, mixed up with trophies of the richest and most polished armour, helmets decked with splendid plumes, and withal a show of jewels that would have sufficed for a king's ransom. Through holes made at regular intervals in the tolerably wide table sprang up to view young palms, and myrtle and orange shrubs, laden with fruit and flowers. A jet of clear, fresh water, conducted through slender tubes, played from beneath on the fronds, and fell back into silver bowls, in which fish of many colours were swimming. On the branches of the shrubs fluttered little birds tied on with artfully concealed horsehair. Having been reared in cages, and tamed, they warbled, undismayed by the sight and noise of the company.

A large sideboard, opposite the seats set apart for the principal guests, groaned beneath the weight of the plate and large salvers of beaten silver, engraved in relief with ara-

besque designs. In front of it was a high stool on which the butler was to sit and, with his ebony wand, direct the servants and waiters. On the floor, within the horse-shoe, stood two large bronze vessels, full of water for rinsing and washing (such as may be seen in Paul Veronese's supper scenes), and inside them flagons and decanters of Spanish and Italian wine were set to cool. The musicians were stationed in galleries raised about twenty feet from the ground, on each side of the hall.

Thanks to Diego Garcia's zeal and the cook's diligence, shortly after noon the butler (followed by fifty waiters, dressed in red and yellow, and bearing towels, basins, and ewers to pour water over the hands of the assembled company) entered the room and announced that dinner was served. The Duc de Nemours, radiant with youth, health and a Frenchman's innate grace, offered Donna Elvira his hand to lead her to her seat. Who could have foreseen, at that moment, that this young prince,

his eyes now sparkling with vivacity, his limbs now so full of life, and who seemed destined to a happy and glorious future, would, in a few days, be lying cold and motionless, stretched on a miserable bier in the Chapel of Cerignola; and that a passing expression of pity from Consalvo would be the last emotion he would arouse in any human heart!

Consalvo having taken a seat between Vittoria Colonna and the Duke, and placed his daughter on the latter's right hand, with Fieramosca on the other side of her, the feast began. Donna Elvira, being of a susceptible nature, could not help being impressed by her squire's suavity, as well as by the enconiums she heard lavished on him from all sides, and the high esteem in which he seemed to be held by his friends. Seated together at dinner, the conversation was carried on between them in much the same strain of pleasantry as before; gradually, however, the Italian's brow clouded over, his answers became less ready, and not

always to the purpose. Donna Elvira shot glances at him from beneath her eye-lashes, with mingled doubt and impatience; but finding that he sat with downcast eyes, pale and absent, she began to flatter herself that she was the cause of this sudden change in his manner. This notion made her indulgent; she, too, left off talking, and for a long time they both sat silent, amidst the noise and hilarity of the rest of the company. But poor Elvira was greatly deceived. Fieramosca's trouble was of quite a different nature, and arose from an accidental combination of circumstances. His seat faced the large windows of the hall, which were divided by two Gothic columns. Having been left open, on account of the heat, the whole coast was visible, with Gargano steeped in that beautiful tint which mountains acquire at noon-day, when the air is limpid and serene. In the foreground, out at sea, the little island and Convent of Santa Orsola stood out prominently; and as a dark

object against the pink façade of the strangers' quarters, he could almost make out Ginevra's balcony beneath its sheltering vine. The pure tints of this picture set off the dark figure of Grajano, who sat between him and the balcony.

The contrast to the sky brought out in strong relief his flushed and fiery complexion, and heightened the coarse and devil-may-care expression of his countenance. The mere sense of his presence caused a severe struggle in Fieramosca's mind. Well for him that he was in blissful ignorance of Ginevra's unhappy plight! for at that very moment, having heard from Gennaro of Grajano's existence in Barletta, she was forming in the Chapel the resolution of quitting the place for ever.

Amid the din of such a large party, Ettore and Donna Elvira attracted but little attention, but Vittoria Colonna, who already had her suspicions, was struck by the alteration in the two young people. With many misgivings

lest there should have been any sentimental passages between them, she kept on the *qui vive*, noting every gesture, both of the knight and of her friend, on whose account she could not help feeling anxious.

While the situation stood thus with respect to this trio, considerable progress had been made with the dinner, which was served with the profusion and variety of viands demanded by the fashion of the day. If the culinary art is by no means an easy one in our days, much less so was it in those; exacting, as it did, from the cook, on an occasion like the present, triumphs of skill of which we moderns have not the slightest idea. The dishes were required not only to please the palate, but also to gratify the eyes of the banqueters. In front of Consalvo was a large peacock with its feathers spread out like a wheel. The difficulty of cooking it without spoiling its symmetry had been so successfully overcome, that anyone would have taken it to be alive. It

was surrounded, on the same dish, by several smaller birds that seemed to be watching it: these were stuffed with spices and aromatic herbs. At certain distances apart, towered enormous pies, four feet high. At a preconcerted signal from the butler, the covers rose apparently of their own accord; from within, sprang up strangely-habited dwarfs who, head and shoulders alone in sight, ladled out the contents with silver spoons, and pelted the guests with flowers. Sundry dishes of confectionary were moulded in the shape of hillocks, dotted over with shrubs bearing candied fruits. Some were distilled waters forming lakes, on which floated little boats constructed of sugar and filled with sweetmeats; while others represented bleak mountains crowned with volcanoes, emitting the most deliciously scented fumes. Within were chesnuts and other fruits, gently roasting over flames of aqua vitæ. Amongst other game was a young wild boar served in its skin. In its

intact state, it bore the appearance of being attacked by the spears of huntsmen made of paste; but when carved it was found to be cooked; even the huntsmen were cut up and distributed with the meat.

Towards the end of the banquet, four pages entered the hall, dressed as chessmen in red and yellow, riding on four white horses, and carrying an enormous platter, on which lay a tunny fish nearly six feet in length. They placed it before Consalvo, and while everyone expressed admiration of its bulk, and of the style in which it was ornamented (bearing on its back the nude figure of a youth with a lyre, representing Arion of Methymna), Consalvo turned to the Duc de Nemours, handed him a knife, and prayed him to open the fish's mouth.

The Duke opened it, and forthwith, there issued a quantity of doves which, spreading their wings, flew about the hall as fast as they were released from their prison. This conceit

was at once hailed with delight. Moreover, as the doves alighted here and there, it was discovered that a jewel, with a ticket attached, inscribed with a name, was suspended round the neck of each one.

Quite a sight was it to see the rush that ensued in giving chase to the doves, as soon as the company became aware of Consalvo's intention, thus gracefully, to bestow a souvenir on his guests. Great was the satisfaction of anyone who effected a capture in presenting it to the rightful recipient as indicated by the ticket.

Fanfulla, too, started off in pursuit. The one that bore Donna Elvira's name having flown over his head, while it was still on the wing he managed to decipher the ticket. Being vastly smitten with the maiden's face, he made up his mind that none but he should present her with the gift; so keeping his eye on the bird, with his wonted agility he secured it, pushed his way through the crowd, bent one

knee to the ground before her, offered her the dove, and pointed out that a clasp of very fine large diamonds was tied round its neck.

Donna Elvira received the dove in the most gracious manner. As she pressed it to her cheek to caress it, it became scared and flapped its wings, waving and ruffling her hair which was arranged in ringlets over her faintly-blushing brow. While she was detaching the jewels from the dove's neck, Fanfulla rose and gallantly remarked :

" I should say there are not finer diamonds than those in the world ; but, Demoiselle, putting them so near your eyes is enough to dim their lustre."

A complacent smile rewarded Fanfulla for his pointed flattery.

Perhaps some of my readers, accustomed to the delicacy which modern civilisation imposes on all social relations, will think this compliment rather too highly spiced, but we beg them to consider that it was only what might

be expected from a man-at-arms of the *cinque cento*, as harum-scarum as our Lodigian youth. At any rate, what constitutes a better apology for him than any I could make is that Donna Elvira thought he had spoken well and felicitously.

But Fanfulla was somewhat jealous and disgusted when, having duly examined and admired the jewel, she turned to Fieramosca, handed him a gold pin, and desired him to fasten it on her bosom. Vittoria Colonna, who was close by, came forward, looking extremely serious, to perform this office for her. Ettore, conscious of the indiscretion of Donna Elvira's request, was about to give up the clasp; but Elvira, capricious and self-willed, like all children who have had too indulgent parents, stepped between them, and said to Fieramosca, with a laugh intended to cover her pique:

"Are you so accustomed to handle a sword that you disdain to hold a pin between your fingers for a moment?"

The Italian had no alternative but to obey.

Vittoria turned away; the disdainful expression of her fine face denoting how little she could have condescended to such coquetry. Fanfulla remained for an instant eying Fieramosca. "Lucky dog," said he to him, "others sow, and you reap." And off he went whistling, just as though he were alone on the high road, instead of being in distinguished company.

Consalvo's presents, however, were not confined to the ladies only; he had also thought of his French guests; and the Duc de Nemours, as well as his barons, came in for handsome rings, gold ornaments to be worn on the hat, and other trifles. The sumptuousness displayed by the Spanish Captain in this banquet was not without an object. He wished to show the French that he was provided, not only with sufficient means for the requirements of his own people, but with more than enough to meet the calls of hospitality.

This diversion, caused by the doves, having come to an end, all resumed their seats in anticipation of the forthcoming toasts.

The Duc de Nemours, according to French custom, rose, took his cup, and turning to Donna Elvira, prayed her henceforth to accept him as her *preux chevalier*, saving the obedience he owed to His Most Christian Majesty. The damsel graciously acknowledged his courtesy, and after several other toasts, Consalvo thought it time to rise, and, followed by his guests, went out on to a gallery which overlooked the beach, where they whiled away, in conversation, the remaining hours of daylight.

Donna Elvira and Fieramosca passed the greater part of this time together. It seemed as though the girl could not keep away from him for a minute. If he retired to a distance mixing with the rest of the company, or beat a retreat into one of the many groups, in a few minutes he found her again at his elbow. Ettore, too sagacious to remain blind to this

preference, but well aware that no good could come of it, was too right-minded to encourage her, although bound, both by good-breeding and his duty to Consalvo, to treat her with politeness. More than one of the lookers-on saw through this little game, and laughed in his sleeve. Fanfulla, who still felt some vexation about the episode of the dove, chafed to see his friend in such favour, and as soon as he could get near enough to him, he whispered: "I will pay you out somehow or other!"

CHAPTER III.

FLIRTATION.

"The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men.
A thousand hearts beat happily; and when
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,
Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,
And all went merry as a marriage bell."

Childe Harold.

"His boat appears—not five oars' length—
His comrades strive with desperate strength.
Oh! are they yet in time to save?"

Bride of Abydos.

"His steps the chamber gain—his eyes behold
All that his heart believed not—yet foretold."

The Corsair.

In the large hall on the ground floor, which, in all old fortresses, was the usual resort of the

men-at-arms, a theatre had been erected very much like our modern ones, except that, in those days, the curtain, instead of being raised, was allowed to fall into the place now occupied by the orchestra. A company of strolling comic actors had been summoned from a town near the sea-coast: these, having passed the Carnival in Venice, were moving on from town to town, performing dramas on their way to Naples for the feast of Saint Januarius, or to Palermo for that of Saint Rosalie. Having now to appear before such a select audience, they had taken extra pains with their rehearsal, so that the performance might be a success. As soon as night set in, the spectators took their seats, and the order was given to begin. A large cloth, which acted as a drop scene, was lowered, and the stage appeared; on one side, was seen a portico, embellished with pillars and statues, which seemed to be the entrance to a palace, on the door of which was inscribed, in letters of gold, "THE LAND OF BABYLON."

On a throne under the portico, and surrounded by nobles, sat a king with a golden sceptre in his hand, dressed in oriental costume, wearing a large turban studded with gems, and a crown on the top of it. In the middle of the stage was a sea-coast; and on the other side, beneath a rugged mountain bristling with rocks and trees, was excavated a cavern, whence, from time to time, issued a dragon evidently on guard over a very brightly gilt ram's fleece which was suspended to an adjacent tree.

Beside the king, on a smaller throne, sat a tall, stout, handsome woman dressed in red satin, with a train three feet in length, and a black velvet mantle of French fashion; at her side was a scimitar, and in her hand she held a book and rod. This was Medea.

Before long, a vessel hove in sight, from which several young men disembarked, in the garb of soldiers; one of them, very handsome, and covered all over, head excepted, with

plates of mail, was Jason: two young Moors carried his shield and helmet.

Advancing, and bowing to the king, he began an address in octosyllabics, which probably grated as much on Vittoria Colonna's ear as they will on my reader's:

"Di christianità venemo
Argonauti se chiamemo
Al soldan de Babillona
Che Dio salvi sua corona."

Continuing in this strain, he announced that they had come to carry off the golden fleece. King Aetes, after consulting with his nobles and daughter, signified his consent, and went away, leaving Medea alone with Jason.

The latter began, at once, to pay court to the princess; begged of her to help him, and promised to convey her to Christendom, marry and make her a great queen. Medea allowed herself to be easily won over, and taught him some incantations which would send the dragon to sleep; but specially charged him, if he

wished them to be effectual, not to invoke any Saint nor make the sign of the Cross, for either of these formulas would render them abortive. As soon as she was gone, Jason turned to his companions, and, observing that it was unworthy of a good knight to resort to incantations, told them that he should first try and overcome the dragon with other weapons; so, placing his hand on his sword, and screening himself with the buckler which was handed to him by one of the squires while the other laced on his helmet, he proceeded to attack the dragon. But issuing forth from the cavern, and vomiting flames, it made such a vigorous defence that, after the battle had lasted a few minutes, Jason was obliged to give up the attempt. His companions then exhorted him to make use of the spells; he complied, and succeeded in lulling the dragon to sleep, and took down the fleece without any opposition. This done, Medea rejoined them, and implored them all to return to the ship instantly and

take her with them. Inland was heard the clash of trumpets, cymbals, clarions, and other moresque instruments. Shortly, a youth, in a saracenesque costume, arrived on horseback, and defied Jason who accepted the challenge, and, after a few blows, knocked him over. But, proceeding to embark with his followers, King Aetes appeared on the scene, and, seeing his son Absirtus dead on the ground, and his daughter on the point of eloping, gave orders for the detention of the Argonauts. Medea then began her incantations; the air became obscured; several men, grotesquely attired as demons, rushed about with torches, set Babylon on fire, and bore away the king and all his barons; while, in the background, the Argonauts were seen going off scot free. Thus ended the play.

It should be observed by such of our readers as pride themselves on the superior attractions of modern theatres, that the art of eliciting applause from the audience in a certain class

of spectacle, and which consists in so arranging matters that the performance winds up with a grand finale of fire or wreck, of Olympus or Tartarus, is by no means a novelty of our age, but was had recourse to for scenic effect, and duly appreciated by the public of the sixteenth century.

The company for whose edification this play was acted, (though partly composed of persons not destitute of culture,) seemed satisfied with it; and, indeed, considering what an out-of-the-way place it was, they acquitted themselves very creditably for comedians of their stamp.

Among those invited to the fêtes, were a great many whose inferior condition forbade their mixing with the knights and nobles, but who were enjoying a similar spectacle which had been prepared for them in the courtyard; and certainly, the shouts and exclamations proceeding from it betokened the liveliest approbation.

Some Spanish soldiers had applied for and

obtained leave to recite, in their less pretentious fashion, one of their national comedies. They fitted up one corner of the court with boards and curtains like a theatre, and, for several days past, had been hard at work practising their different parts. The comedy selected was one dear to the heart of every Spaniard, entitled "*Las mocedades del Cid*," which, literally, means "the boyish pranks of the Cid"; and of which his youthful feats were the special theme. Afterwards, if there was time, they were to act a Saynete, by way of a *petite pièce*, as the French call it.

At the same time as the play we have described commenced in the Castle, the curtain rose in the second theatre before a numerous audience composed of non-commissioned officers, soldiers, officials, townspeople, shopkeepers, and an immense concourse of the lower orders. The aristocracy of the assembly was comfortably seated near the stage, inferiority of status being clearly defined by in-

creasing distance from the centre of attraction; while quite on the outskirts of the crowd congregated ragged tramps and pick-pockets. The courtyard was open to all, so the crush was very great; and as all could not equally enjoy the diversion, on account of difference of situation, those who were furthest off made up for it by clamour, howls and hisses, to the great indignation of those nearest the stage, who made a vain effort to suppress them with cries of "Hush!" proceeding from all sides; but instead of a restraint, these acted rather as a stimulus to the disturbance.

In the thick of the pleasure-seeking throng roamed about an individual who, in spite of his poverty-stricken mien and humble attire, was, on account of his personal appearance, rather a conspicuous person in the crowd. As he restlessly and anxiously wandered to and fro, it was evident that diversion was not his object in coming. This man was Pietraccio who, intent on slaying Valentino, and warning

Fieramosca of Ginevra's danger, had made his way so far without hindrance; but now, finding himself in the midst of all this confusion, he became perplexed and conscious of the difficulties in his way of coming across the persons of whom he was in search.

Perhaps our readers will be surprised that an assassin (on whose head a price was set) should dare to come into the town and expose himself to the risk of being taken; and certainly, as society is now constituted, it would have been the height of imprudence. But the communities of that age had not, as we have, laws and police officials established as guardians of the public peace; and Pietraccio, now that the hue and cry was over, to which the Mayor's murder had given rise, was just as safe in Barletta (especially by night) as he would have been with his accomplices in the bush. But no matter what the stumbling-blocks in the pursuit he has on hand, he is far too accustomed to extricate himself from scrapes, and

too eager to wreak his revenge, to be at any loss about the means of carrying his point. Let us leave him to settle matters his own way, while we return to the principal actors of our story.

It was near the second hour of the night when, the play being over, the company returned to the hall where they had dined, and which, by a change in the decorations, had been converted into a ball-room, and was resplendent with innumerable wax candles stuck in large candelabras fixed against the walls, and in beautiful chandeliers suspended from the ceiling in the middle of the room. The orchestra, as at dinner-time, was stationed in the open galleries which ran all round, at about two-thirds of the height between the floor and the cornice. Besides the musicians, who occupied one side only, every sort of person of inferior condition had crowded in to be spectators of an amusement in which they were debarred from taking part.

Consalvo, his guests and the ladies took their seats on a couch placed against the wall, beneath the banners. As soon as the room was full, the Duc de Nemours rose, offered his hand to Donna Elvira, and opened the ball with her.

On the conclusion of that dance, and on the damsel's return to her seat, Fieramosca, anxious not to be behindhand in politeness, offered himself as her partner, first apologising for his want of proficiency. The proposal was accepted with undisguised pleasure. Several other couples paired off; amongst others Fanfulla who, as Donna Elvira was out of the question, chose the one he considered the prettiest among the Barletta ladies present at the fête, and contrived to secure a place, in what we will call a country dance, next to Ettore and his partner. The trouble he took to catch Donna Elvira's every word and gesture, could hardly have afforded him much gratification. The young Spaniard's tremulous

glances betrayed her partiality for her companion. The intoxicating effects of the strains of music and of rapid motion, the frequent contact of hands, in a word, the freedom which dancing promotes, even amongst those who on all other occasions would be on the most distant terms, produced in Consalvo's daughter an excitation of feeling which she could hardly keep within bounds. Ettore and Fanfulla both noticed it; the former with regret, the latter with pique which he indulged by badgering Fieramosca with *sotto voces* and knowing winks. Much annoyed at such jesting, Ettore preserved a serious and somewhat melancholy air, which the damsel interpreted after her own fashion, and was very far from guessing the truth.

At last Donna Elvira, with her characteristic recklessness, took advantage of a moment when she was holding his hand to lean towards him and say, in an undertone, "As soon as this dance is over, I shall go on to the terrace

which overlooks the sea; come, for I want to speak to you."

Fieramosca, painfully impressed by these words which convinced him that a serious intrigue was imminent, changed countenance, and for sole answer bowed assent. But whether Donna Elvira was not careful to lower her voice sufficiently, or whether Fanfulla was too much on the *qui vive*, certain it is that he overheard these unlucky words; and cursing in his heart the good fortune which fell to Fieramosca's lot instead of to his own, he muttered between his teeth, "Are there no means of making the little fool pay dearly for it?"

Ettore, for his part, felt himself on the horns of a dilemma. Not for one instant did it enter his head to lend an ear to the seductions of the beautiful Spaniard; in the first place, because Ginevra's image had too firm a hold of his heart; in the second, because, even this motive apart, he had too much sense to

trifle with Consalvo's daughter who had no chance of touching his heart by such arts as hers; for he was not one of those who, in cases of this sort, are always ready to make the most of their opportunities. On the other hand, he was averse to appearing uncivil, churlish, or, perhaps, even worse; for among other human contradictions, there exists one of calling certain *things* wrong, and, at the same time, *those* who decline to do them, fools, and wanting in spirit. During the rest of the dance, he racked his brains to find (as says the proverb) some means of saving both the goat and the cabbages. At last, after changing his mind several times, seeing that the critical moment was at hand, he resolved to run some risk rather than wrong Ginevra. Reflecting that while he was taking part in these fêtes, she was alone in a poor Convent out at sea, with no thoughts but of him, he reproached himself bitterly with having for one single instant hesitated about his love for her coming before

all other considerations; so as soon as he had finished dancing with Donna Elvira, he became anxious to get away; and bethinking himself of pleading, as an excuse, one of those headaches which were just as useful on such occasions in the sixteenth as in the nineteenth century, he prepared to leave the ball and go home.

The young men who had figured in this country dance, for the sake of greater freedom in their movements, and also because it was the custom, had taken off their cloaks, which they wore over the left shoulder, and had left them all together in an adjoining room, appearing in their *juste-au-corps* and hose, which were mostly white. Fanfulla and Ettore were thus attired, and were a good match for one another both in dress and figure; any difference between them would only be noticeable when they resumed their cloaks: Ettore wore a blue one embroidered in silver, and Fanfulla a red one.

Ettore found Diego Garcia, and begged him to make his excuses to Consalvo and his daughter for being obliged to go away on account of his headache. He then went towards the room to fetch his cloak. As he was about to cross the threshold, at a moment when, the crowd having scattered a little, there was no one close to him, he felt himself struck gently on the shoulder by a solid body which fell from above and bounded off on to his foot. Glancing down, he saw a small folded piece of paper which contained something heavy. He looked up at the gallery from which it appeared to have fallen, and saw that no one seemed on the look-out for him. He was on the point of passing on; however, he stooped, picked it up, unfolded it, and found inside a pebble which had been put in to give it weight and steadiness in falling. On it was scrawled, in rude and almost unintelligible handwriting, "Madonna Ginevra is to be carried off from Santa Orsola at the stroke of three, by a plot

of Valentino's. Your informant is waiting for you, with three of his mates, at the large gate of the Castle, and he will have a javelin in his hand."

A shiver ran through Ettore, even to the very marrow of his bones; all the more, as he remembered the Castle clock had struck half-past two, some little time. There was not a moment to be lost. Pale and staggering like a mortally wounded man, quick as lightning he found the door, dashed headlong down the great staircase, just as he was, without cloak or cap, to the amazement of all who met him; and onwards he rushed to the appointed rendezvous so precipitately, that he was obliged to catch hold of the iron ring on the portal to stop himself. The entrance archway was very dark. He looked round, panting with haste and anguish, whereupon a man, who had been crouched up against the wall, came forward with a javelin in his hand.

Fieramosca's precipitate retreat from the

ball, in such evident agitation, had been observed by many who did not offer to follow him when they heard from Diego Garcia the reason assigned by himself. But Inigo and Brancaleone, who were particular friends of his, were not so easily satisfied. Though they could not overtake him, they kept him in sight, and reached the gateway a few seconds after him.

They found Fieramosca clutching hold of Pietraccio and dragging him along, while vehemently urging, "Let us be off, then! quick, quick!" Catching sight of his friends, he hastily addressed himself to them:

"If you would act the part of friends by me, come and help me against that treacherous Valentino. Let us get into a boat. There are seven of us, and we shall soon reach Santa Orsola."

Brancaleone, with a glance at himself and his companions, answered: "And where are the arms?"

"In fact none of them had as much a

a sword. Fieramosca was beside himself, stamped, tore his hair, and seemed on the verge of madness. Then Brancaleone, who, in emergencies, was never at a loss either for words or resources, said: "You, Ettore, go down to the sea with those men; get the boat and oars ready, and wait for us. You, Inigo, come with me." And off he ran with him, while Fieramosca shouted after them: "Quick, quick! it is nearly three o'clock." Though his friends neither understood the meaning of these words, nor the reason for such dispatch, aware that the case must be urgent, they rushed into the house of the brothers Colonna, and into the hall on the second floor where the arms were kept, tore down off the wall coats of mail, helmets and swords for three, set off running again with equal speed, rejoined him in the boat, threw the armour in, and jumped in themselves. Inigo, with one foot resting on the shore, gave a shove off; then seizing the oars, they stooped over them and

made them bend beneath the strain. To pass out from the small port behind the Rock, they had to go below the clock-tower. As they did so, they heard, overhead, the running down of the wheels in the works before striking. Poor Ettore bowed himself down, and suddenly drooped his head, as though he expected that the tower was, then and there, about to fall on it. A few seconds after, the clock gave forth the three fatal strokes, and the deep tones woke the distant echoes in faint and ever-fainter cadences.

Before seeing the upshot of their expedition, we must return for a short time to the ball-room.

Fanfulla, who had become master of Donna Elvira's secret, either by chance or his own acuteness, had been casting about in his mind how he could turn it to account, but did not see his way to so doing till he noticed his preferred rival make his impetuous exit without either cap or cloak. A mad idea then struck him;

and as he never, for an instant, hesitated whenever it was a question of gratifying a caprice, no matter what the consequences, he proceeded forthwith, still more insanely, to put it into execution.

He had kept his eye on Consalvo's daughter, and since he had seen her, as soon as the dance was over, make her way to the arcade, he knew she could not have perceived Fieramosca's departure. He ran hastily to the room from which everybody had fetched away their cloaks. Besides his own, there only remained Fieramosca's, and also the latter's dark velvet cap adorned with a drooping plume. He put it on his head in such a way that the feathers partly shaded his face; he threw his friend's blue cloak over his shoulder, and anyone, not seeing his face, would have declared it was Fieramosca. Thus disguised, he passed softly through the crowd to the arcade where there were no lights, the darkness being only relieved by the brilliancy of those within.

Several fruit-trees, in tubs arranged round a miniature fountain, blocked up the place to such an extent, that it was easy to screen oneself from any who might chance to come that way out of the ball-room. When Fanfulla stepped out, it so happened that no one was there. He advanced cautiously, and saw Donna Elvira sitting near the parapet with her elbow on the iron rail, leaning her head on her hand and gazing steadfastly at the sky.

The moon was, just then, obscured by some fleeting clouds, and Fanfulla knew that if he did not seize this favourable opportunity, his risk of discovery would be much greater on the return of the light; so he advanced on tip-toe towards Donna Elvira, who did not hear him till he was quite close. When she turned her head to look at him, Fanfulla, bowing his with much grace and dexterity, bent one knee to the ground beside her, seized her hand, pressed it to his lips, and managed so successfully to conceal his face, that she had not the

slightest suspicion that he was other than Fieramosca.

She made a movement to withdraw her hand, but, according to the usages of all times, this was resisted with pardonable violence. Though Donna Elvira was of a wilful, flighty, and capricious disposition, we may, however, credit her with certain scruples anent this intimate *tête-à-tête* with a strange cavalier; and, doubtless, she rather shrank from the possibility of being discovered by her father or, still worse, by her severe friend.

A somewhat stronger puff of wind removed the veil that covered the face of the moon which, being full, lighted up the whole place with its refulgent beam, and revealed the brilliant attire of Fanfulla and Elvira. Perhaps neither of them remarked it; but they were startled by a sharp scream, in a female voice, proceeding from the foot of the terrace which was raised only a few feet above the sea. Apprehensive that other dancers might

be attracted out by the cry, they made the best of their way back, in opposite directions, to the hall, where the few who had given it a moment's thought, had now, under the influence of other attractions, ceased to trouble their heads about it.

However, the first shriek had been succeeded by a fainter and half-smothered one, which was followed by the dull thud of a human body falling into the bottom of a boat. But the arcade was deserted. Within, all were intent on the fête. No one came forward to see who the unfortunate creature might be who was in need of assistance.

While these events were transpiring at the Castle, the boat which was conveying Fieramosca and his companions, propelled by seven strong men, flew bounding over the waves towards the Convent, leaving behind a long streak of foam. Brancaleone, seeing that Ettore was possessed by the sole idea of rowing with all his might, said resolutely:

"Look here, Ettore! I don't know where you are taking us, but it certainly does not look like child's play; and if there is real work to be done, much good these coats of mail will do us, as long as they lie in the bottom of the boat."

These words had their due effect, and they began to arm themselves, heedful, however, that only one at a time should give up his oar to dress. After they had girded on their swords and laced on some light iron caps, they resumed their oars with fresh energy, keeping a sharp look out a-head for their enemies. On the way, Ettore told them, in broken accents, why he claimed their aid.

All at once, they espied a little boat at a short distance, and gave chase; but on approaching, saw that it was being rowed by a single person in the direction of Barletta. In order not to lose time, they turned the boat's head again towards the Convent, without ascertaining anything further about the rower. Inigo advised hailing it, to learn if anything

had been either heard or seen. But Ettore would not hear of it. The specified hour was passed, and he had faint hopes of arriving in time. If Inigo's advice had but been taken, how many misfortunes would have been averted!

The outlines of the Convent were becoming more clearly defined. Fieramosca kept his eyes fixed on it, and saw that all the windows were in darkness; but on the left, about two gunshots off, was to be seen a long, low boat skimming, like a swallow, over the surface of the water.

Simultaneously, Ettore, Inigo, and Brancaleone, with bated breath, exclaim, "There they are!" and turning the prow in that direction, they redouble their efforts. The other boat, becoming aware of their design, takes to flight. But the vigour of their pursuers seems to be tripled; the space between the two boats sensibly diminishes; already voices can be heard from one to the other; already Fiera-

mosca, rising as high as he can without letting go the oar, sees a woman lying in the poop, guarded by two men, and roars out "Traitors!" in tones which resound throughout the cloisters.

"Pull away, pull away, row for your lives!" shout they all, frantically setting their teeth; and soon their bows almost touch the enemy's stern. Ettore, quick as lightning, drops his oar, brandishes his sword, and springs among his foes who, with bristling arms, are well prepared to receive him. The push which he cannot help giving his own boat, in taking his leap, has checked its momentum and left it behind, so that he finds himself alone, and receives, on his head and body, several blows from which his coat of mail and headpiece protect him. But his associates, who see his peril, speedily rejoin him. Pietraccio, who is nearest, jumps the second, but hardly has he reached the spot where he expects to find Valentino, than he is knocked

down and stunned by a blow on the head from an oar. Inigo and Brancaleone are fighting by Fieramosca's side at such close quarters that, adepts as they are in the use of their swords, they have no room to wield them, cramped up as they are forwards in the bottom of the boat; consequently, they neither inflict nor receive much damage. With the greatest rapidity, they exchange blows and thrusts, making the boat rock so violently that it is in great danger of being upset.

Pietraccio's companions, unable to come to the front, as the space does not admit of more than three men abreast, have been none the less useful. They have lifted the woman out of the poop into their own boat, and in pursuance of the advice given, in an aside, by Brancaleone, the three combatants gradually retire, spring all at once into their own boat, and allow the others to make off.

Ettore would not have let them off so easy if he had recognised Valentino among the crew;

but not seeing him, he supposed that on this occasion he had only risked the lives of his *bravi*, and he considered it beneath him to imbrue himself with their blood. Besides, as Ginevra was safe (at least, so he believed) he thought the best thing he could do would be to devote himself at once to her. Don Michele, on the other hand, gnashed his teeth at seeing the fruit of so many intrigues snatched from his grasp, and also at having neglected, in the first confusion, to put the woman in safety in the bows; but the thing was done, and he knew that to attempt a rescue out of the hands of those gallant youths would be like trying to make a hole in water. But Valentino's agent was not altogether without some amends for his discomfiture. While the three comrades were retreating to their boat, he pressed upon them with his sword in his right, and his dagger in his left hand. He aimed several blows at Fieramosca who was the last to leave, and as he was springing over the edge, suc-

ceeded in pricking him slightly in the neck. But in the heat of the melée Ettore was unconscious of it.

Both parties thus drawing off from one another, one continued its course towards Barletta, while the other made for the Convent. The woman was wrapped up in a sheet. Fieramosca, still panting, raised her into a sitting posture, set her free from the cloth which covered her, and, instead of Ginevra, found Zoraide! in a swoon.

At any other time he would have blessed God for her deliverance, but now, when he had fancied everything accomplished, it turned out that nothing at all had been done. What had become of Ginevra? how came it to pass that this girl was here? He groaned, struck his forehead, and urged on his companions who, not knowing that it was the wrong woman, were surprised that he was not yet satisfied. A few seconds brought them to the island; he leaped out, took one bound

upstairs, and dashed into Ginevra's room; it was open and empty, and the Convent was steeped in profound repose. As he was rushing out to seek elsewhere for information, his companions arrived in the passage, supporting Zoraide who had regained her senses. To his breathless inquiries she could give no other answer than, that towards 3 o'clock she had been awakened, all at once, by several men who entered her room, wrapped her up in a sheet, and carried her with them to a boat; she remembered nothing more after that. That she knew nothing about Ginevra, not having seen her since the middle of the preceding day, when, remarking that she was oppressed with sadness, she thought it best to leave her alone, and at the usual time had gone to bed without looking for her.

Ettore stood listening to this story, with staring eyes, and at its conclusion a change gradually came over his face; a death-like pallor crept over it, and his cheeks fell in. At last, he

was obliged to sit down, and on attempting to rise again, his knees gave way under him. Meantime one of them had gone to knock at the cloister door, and having roused Gennaro, returned with a light.

Inigo and Brancaleone were struck with Fieramosca's appearance which, in so short a time, had undergone an alarming change; they attributed it to fatigue and anguish of mind. He tried a second time to rise, but his strength quite failed him; he fell down again on the seat with his head backwards, and in a feeble voice faltered: "Brancaleone! Inigo! I never felt so ill in all my life; I have not strength to lift a feather, much less a sword. Time flies, and what will become of Ginevra? Oh that I could get all right again for an hour! . . . Then I should not care. . . . I beseech you, dear comrades, not to delay an instant . . . go you . . . I can't even tell you where . . . but return to Barletta, seek for her, deliver her, find her by any means in your power.

Alack! alack! that I cannot even make one step for her!"

Again he made an effort to rise, but all in vain; again he more passionately implored them to leave him, and fly to her rescue. And so urgent was he, that they, conscious that there was no time to be lost in consultation, left him, promising to return soon with news. In hot speed they embarked, and bore off towards the town.

Zoraide, forthwith, with the greatest solicitude, proceeded to tend her deliverer, and lavished on him words and offices of the tenderest devotion. She unlaced his helmet and strove to unfasten his coat of mail. This accomplished, as she wiped away the cold perspiration which had poured down his face and neck, she perceived the wound he had received a little below the shirt-collar.

"Alas! you are wounded!" she cried; then quickly wiping away with a handkerchief the small quantity of blood which had oozed out,

and which, hiding the wound, made it look larger, she became more composed at the apparent slightness of it, and said:

"Oh, it is nothing! a mere scratch."

But as she examined it more attentively with the candle, she saw a purplish red swelling, like a rose, round the wound. She then looked at his face, and noticed that his eyes and lips had a livid appearance, and that his hands and ears were the colour of boxwood, cold and rigid. Her Eastern birth and training had given her experience in the treatment of every sort of hurt, and she immediately suspected that the dagger had been poisoned. She entreated the young man to lie down on the bed, and, with difficulty, helped him on to it. Then she felt his pulse, and found that it beat but languidly and with a fluttering motion.

But his bodily pains were as nothing to Fieramosca in comparison with the whirl of distracting thoughts with which his brain was teeming. The events of that evening and

Ginevra's peril had, hitherto, allowed him to think of nothing else but her; but like the condemned criminal who, on the last night of his life, snatches one brief hour of slumber, only to wake up with a crushing sense of imminent death, so, hardly had Fieramosca somewhat roused himself from his bewilderment, when the challenge flashed across his mind, as well as the oath he had taken not to expose himself to any risk of being wounded. He writhed at the very thought of the disgrace he would incur for his neglect of it; of his grief at being unable to raise his sword in company with his fellows, and thus becoming the laughing-stock of the French, to say nothing of the slur on Italian honour. Stung to the very quick at this idea, his contracted muscles gave so convulsive a start, and he heaved such a bitter sigh, that Zoraide sprang in dismay to her feet, and asked him what was the matter. Ettore exclaimed:

"The challenge, Zoraide! the challenge!

I am shamed for ever!" (He struck his forehead with his clenched fist.) "It only wants a few days to the time; and I am so pulled down that I shall not be fit for much for a month to come. Oh! what sin am I expiating by this great misfortune?"

The damsel knew not how to answer; but, probably, thought less of the battle than of the present danger of *him* round whom all the fibres of her heart were entwined; a danger which, she knew by experience, was becoming every minute more serious. This state of excitement had suddenly given place to a sort of lethargy. He had fallen back flat, with his head down on the pillow, paler than ever. The veins in his neck throbbed convulsively; and when she gave another look at the wound, she found that the red circle had spread to almost the length of a finger across.

Still Ettore continued to bewail himself:

"So much for the champion of Italian honour! so much for the glorious end of the

battle, our valour, and boastings about it! What is my crime in the eyes of God? What else could I have done?"

Far enough were these reasonings from bringing him consolation, and he thought to himself:

"Who would listen to such a tale? To whom could I explain the whole case? And even if I should succeed in justifying myself, will it not give a handle to the enemy to feign incredulity, and say, 'It is all shirking on Ettore's part, because he was afraid of us'?"

While in this state of mental perturbation, the poison, with which Don Michele's dagger had only too surely inoculated him, was creeping on through the veins which branch off over the surface of the skull; and there fell, by degrees, a sort of mist over both sight and intellect, with a tension of the temples which, at first, made every object seem to dance before him, then sparkle and whirl rapidly round, until he was fairly dazzled.

Zoraide stood beside him, trembling and terrified, and Ettore glared at her with eyes wide open and fixed. By the feeble light of the flickering candle, it appeared to his tottering senses as though her features went through a series of distortions, beginning with the semblance of La Mothe. This phantom, curling the corners of its mouth into a frightful and malignant grin, gradually increased in size, and forth from its dilated jaws issued the spectral form of Grajano d'Asti; diminutive at first, it gradually grew larger, opened its mouth wide, and, in turn, produced, from within, the pale similitude of Valentino. So these forms, each the outgrowth of the preceding one, presented a regular phantasmagoria of those persons whose images were just then most vividly impressed on the sick man's brain. Amongst others came up a vision of Ginevra whom he addressed by name, in terms of the most fervent love, saying reproachfully, "Have you the heart to leave me to die thus? I who

loved you so dearly! Take me out of this pit . . . take away the tarantulas that are crawling over my face!" and other like empty words. After which, the figures he had been conjuring up became fused in a sort of spectrum, red and quivering as a protracted flash of lightning. Soon it began to pale, then gradually faded away and died out altogether, as the young man's physical and mental powers became entirely suspended.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

"GHOST.—

Dream on—dream on of bloody deeds and death.
Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy breath!

KING RICHARD.—

Soft; I did but dream.
Oh, coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What do I fear? myself? There's none else by."

King Richard III.

"Ah, several sins, all us'd in each degree,
Throng to the bar, crying all—Guilty! guilty!
Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
Came to my tent; and everyone did threat
To-morrow's vengeance."

King Richard III.

IN order to carry on, *pari passu*, the relation of the several accidents which, that evening,

separately befell the different actors in this romance, we have been obliged to leave the reader in suspense as to the fate of each; and though this is the practice of many story-tellers, we hardly think it can be a satisfactory one, when the book in hand is such as to inspire a wish to know the end. We will not apologise to the reader for having adopted this method; for in our case, at any rate, it was indispensable.

We must now even leave Fieramosca for a time; return to the fortress, and find Valentino whom we left in the lower rooms overlooking the *marina*.

In spite of his astuteness, he had been foiled in the first of the two objects which had brought him to the Spanish army. He had been unable to instil into Consalvo's mind sufficient confidence to induce him either to make a league with him, or even to back him up. The Spaniard, keeping faith with him as to his concealment, had declined his overtures,

but in other respects treated him with the honours which were considered due to his rank if not to his character. During the seven or eight days he passed in trying to work out this intrigue, he had remained almost always shut up in his rooms, in order to avoid recognition; and when, at rare intervals, he went out to take the air, it was always by night, and masked, as was customary in that century among men of high estate, and which practice often proved useful in forwarding their far from laudable ends. But, as we mentioned before, his political aims were supplemented by designs against the fair dame who had been bold enough to spurn him; and if Don Michele's promises and dexterity were to be trusted, these machinations were to bear fruit that very night. It may, perhaps, be inconceivable to some, how this signal scoundrel, addicted to every sort of profligacy, could place such a high value on any woman and follow up her traces so keenly. And, indeed, it would

be a mistake to admit that love, even in the lowest sense, was influencing Valentino in the slightest degree. But Ginevra had repulsed him with contempt and horror. He believed her to be living happily with another. He felt himself worsted and derided; and who in the whole world could boast of ever having got the better of Cesar Borgia?

He had entrapped every woman he had met, who was possessed of any charms, into either guilt or misery; and amongst these were many worthy and virtuous ones who, on account of their powerful connections, might have esteemed themselves safe from him. Was it, then, to be borne that an insignificant creature, little known and less cared for, should set him at defiance, he who had made Italy tremble from one extremity to the other?

But Valentino now felt that his hour of vengeance was at hand, and he muttered, "You shall pay me dearly for my discomfort in this wretched hiding-place!" and truly,

accustomed as he was to the splendours of the Roman Court, an abode in these small prison-like chambers must have seemed a certain hardship to him, if it was in the man's nature to consider any amount of privations hard in the pursuit of his ends. However, he had not been entirely without resources for the employment of his time. Besides the hours spent with Consalvo, and his occupation of devising schemes with Don Michele, there arrived, every day, messengers from his confidential agents in the Romagna, bringing him letters, papers, and reports on passing events. They arrived, and started again, by night, verifying in every particular the assertion made by Niccolò Machiavelli who, writing to the Commune of Florence a short time previous to this epoch, said: "Of all the Courts in the world, that in which secrecy is best preserved is undoubtedly the Duke's!" And although he did not plainly add why, yet he insinuated that all imprudent

tongues were sealed with the silence of the tomb.

This correspondence was kept up by means of the vessels which, coasting along from the Romagna, lurked during the day among the reefs at the foot of Monte Gargano; thence, at nightfall, the messenger proceeded in a small boat to the fortress; and it was from their crews, composed of picked men, that Don Michele had selected the associates he required for his enterprise. This evening, while the Castle was resonant with noise and strains of music, Valentino, in order to pass away the time, was seated before a table, re-examining, by the light of a lamp, several papers which the couriers had brought him on the preceding days. He was dressed in a black satin vest, fastened in front by a row of small buttons, somewhat tight in the waist and in the sleeves which were slashed with white velvet bands caught down to the arm, here and there, by hoops of the same material; near the collar,

three or four buttons left open displayed to view a coat of mail of the finest wrought steel, which he always wore beneath. This was the Duke's habitual costume; and visitors to the Borghese Palace at Rome may remember to have seen him so portrayed by Raphael. The sedentary life he had lately been leading, contrary to his usual habits, combined with the effects of the spring season, had aggravated a complaint of the nature of erysipelas to which he was subject, rendering his appearance more repulsive and malevolent even than usual.

Towards 2 o'clock, when the ball was beginning in the hall above, the Duke's door was gently pushed open by a man clothed in dark close-fitting red hose, and a cloak which reached halfway down to his knees, with a black hood over his eyes, armed with sword and dagger, and carrying a parcel under his arm. Valentino looked up. The man entered and saluted, then laid the parcel on the table, without a word being uttered by either. The Duke

placed one hand on the package, and said to the messenger: "I shall leave here to-night. Go into the furthest of those rooms, shut yourself in; and no matter what you hear, don't come unless I call you."

The man went out by a door opposite the one which had given him admittance; and Cesar Borgia, taking from his side a dagger as sharp as a razor, cut the threads of red silk which, secured by the apostolic seals, fastened a letter written to him on parchment by Pope Alexander. As he opened it, a small gold ball rolled out on to the table. At the sight of it, the Duke started suspiciously to his feet, but on looking more attentively at the seals and handwriting, he became reassured, and resumed his seat.

Nor need this alarm of his be altogether attributed to panic; for in that century there were so many ways of preparing poisons, and sending them in such a form that they should take effect immediately the letter containing

them was opened, that it was quite excusable in the Duke to be startled at the sight of an unexpected object; and if there was one man more than another who had reason to be on the look-out for the worst, he it was assuredly.

The epistle was written in a cypher of which no one possessed the key, save the Pope and himself. Long practice enabled him to read it fluently, and this was the substance of it.

The Pontiff had been tempted by the Orator of the Most Christian King to conclude a league with him against the Catholic King, with the view of despoiling him of the kingdom of Naples; offering, at the same time, to unite his forces with those of the Church for an expedition against Siena and the States of Co. Giordano. The Pope had not thought well to enter into these negotiations till he knew what progress Valentino had made in his intrigue with Consalvo. That, from his mother and from Cardinal Orsino's friend, he had received a sum of money and a pearl of mar-

vellous beauty, both looted from the palace of Monte Giordano, when it was sacked by order of the Pope after the death of the Duke di Gravina, Vitellozzo and Liverotto da Fermo. That he wished the Duke to keep his forces in readiness, so that, on the death of the above-mentioned cardinal, he might join the camp at Bracciano where the Orsini were assembled with their allies.

To supply the funds necessary for the execution of so many designs, the Pontiff had settled to give a Cardinal's hat to Gio. Castellar Archbishop of Trani, to Franc Remolino, Orator to the King of Aragon, to Francesco Soderini di Volterra, to Monsignor di Corneto Secretary of Briefs, and to other rich prelates, pending his son's return to Rome to concert the best measures for seizing on their treasures. Finally, he said he had been warned to be on his guard, that year, against a serious peril, and had been advised to wear about his person, as a charm, a gold ball containing some

very holy relic, similar to the one he was sending the Duke for the same purpose.

Notwithstanding the undeniable truth of the facts shadowed forth in this horrible letter, and though the treachery devised against Cardinal Corneto, in particular, by recoiling on the Pope's own head, was, as is universally known, the cause of his death; nevertheless we have felt some hesitation about disclosing such villany to our readers. But since God, for His own inscrutable purposes, permitted one of the principal custodians of His Sacred Mysteries, to abuse his authority in such a scandalous manner, perhaps any attempt to conceal his iniquities would only be injurious to the cause of Religion; and we might lay ourselves open to the charge of partiality and indulgence in party spirit, instead of solicitude for the triumph of Truth which is well able to hold its own without the aid of Duplicity. The crimes of Pope Borgia and of other Ministers of the Church will be weighed in the unerring balance

of the Wrath of God; and it is not given to man to forecast His judgments. But from the dust of these Popes, no less than from the ashes of the Martyrs, there springs forth, phœnix-like, a truth which points to the Cross of Christ, rearing its glorious form, not on a basis framed by the sword, Mammon and courtly artifices, but on a simple foundation of evangelical virtues.

Very different from these, as may be imagined, were Duke Valentino's reflections on reading his father's letter. Glancing alternately at the writing and at the golden ball which he twirled round between his fingers, a smile crept over his face, partly expressive of contempt (for he believed neither in God nor the Saints), and partly of a timid, mistrustful credulity, for in astrology he *did* put faith. So true is it, that there exists an universal craving of the human intellect after some sheet-anchor external to the world of matter. Even if he had not already arranged to start that

same night for the Romagna, the contents of this letter would have decided him to do so. An intrigue which held out a promise of satisfying his ambition, and so materially augmenting his strength, was of infinitely more importance than carrying out his designs on any woman. He expected that Don Michele would return before long with his party; so depositing the golden ball in his bosom, with a careless gesture and a muttered "If it is to be, it will be," he proceeded to collect the papers and other things that he intended to take with him.

In a few minutes everything was in readiness. He returned to his previous seat, and having nothing else to do, took the ball out of his bosom, looked at it over and over again, dropping it from one hand into another, pondering on its contents and on the donor. Then, one idea leading to another, he became absorbed in musings on the religion of which his father was the Head, the articles of Faith in which

he once had been a believer, and, lastly, on his own splendid position, the fruit of the subjection of Christendom to the Papal authority; but as he jeered, in his heart, at the superstition of the multitude, and smiled complacently at the reflection of how easily they were gulled, he was startled by a still small voice whispering from beneath this edifice of pride, violence and irreligion, "Suppose it should be true!"

The Duke, not choosing to believe, but unable to silence this inward monitor, rose irritably, walked about the room, and did all in his power to distract his thoughts. But in vain. That "Suppose it should be true," haunted him, tormented him, taking, if I may so express myself, the relish out of all the wealth, power, and honours he possessed. He threw himself down on the bed, burying his head furiously in the pillows, and by thus giving vent to the violence of his feelings he succeeded by degrees in calming himself. His

eyelids became heavy: he closed them, and fell asleep.

But in his slumber, the train of his ideas still pursuing the same course, he dreamt he was in Rome, in the street leading from the Castle to Saint Peter's. The heavens and the earth were convulsed and transfigured; semi-darkness and shrieks pervaded the air. He made an effort to run into St. Peter's, but something restrained him, and he gasped painfully for breath. He seemed to be held back by force. Looking round, he recognised all those whom he had betrayed, poisoned, or assassinated; these clutched hold of him by the hair and limbs, and made a persistent and horrible outcry.

Afterwards, without knowing how, he was in St. Peter's, groping about in unspeakable chaos and blackness; the air resounding with lamentations; the walls tottering; the tombs opening and ghosts flitting about. While, still harassed by his victims, who kept on

shouting "The justice of God!" he thought, "This, then, is the judgment in which I refused to believe."

Desperately he struggled to advance and take refuge near the Pope, whom he saw in the background seated on his throne round which flickered a lurid light. But on the one side he was held back by his brother the Duca di Candia with his gaping wounds; on the other side interposed the Duca di Biselli, Astorre Manfredi, besides women and children, who, all weeping, extended their arms towards the Pope, calling out for justice and vengeance! The Pope was shrouded in a large black sacerdotal cloak with the triple crown on his head. The fat, flabby, drooping cheeks of Alexander VI. were as ghastly as those of a corpse. As he slowly drew himself up, as though about to rise to his feet, the cries and wailings were overpowered by a burst of infernal laughter proceeding from the mouth of a demon which, squatting with its knees up to

its chin, screeched out, "Christ! Religion! the Pope! all impostors!" and this last word echoed in a protracted howl through the vaulted roof.

The Duke's ears were still ringing with it when his eyes opened, and he started up in the bed, thoroughly awakened.

For a few moments he remained quite terrified; but the effect of this dream, however, was only to confirm him in the villanous opinion that he might commit any crime soever, without fear of chastisement in the world to come.

He was comforting himself with this reflection (3 o'clock had struck a few minutes previously, and the hum of conversation and sounds of festivity from the company assembled on the story above hardly penetrated through the thickness of the ground-floor vaults) when the same scream, which had interrupted Fanfulla's *tête-à-tête* with Donna Elvira, was heard by the Duke close at hand,

just as though it came from behind his door which opened on to a little dry sand that stretched from the sea to the foundations of the Castle. He went out to look from whom it proceeded; but all he saw was an empty boat which had run ashore, ploughing up the sand. He glanced at the arcade and windows, but there was no one to be seen. He was about to return to his room, when on second thoughts he advanced a few steps towards the boat, and, peering over the side, perceived a woman lying down in the bottom moaning, with her head between her hands. After a first start of surprise, he took a sudden resolve. Getting into the boat, he placed one arm under her shoulders, and another under her knees, and so lifting her, half dead as she was, he carried her in and put her down on the bed. But what was his amazement when, on fetching the light to look at her face, he recognised Ginevra! Those features had made too deep an impression on him for it to be possible that

he could refuse to believe the evidence of his eyes; yet he could not conceive by what strange fatality she had fallen alone into his hands, after having apparently eluded the snares of Don Michele.

"Henceforth," said he to himself, "I shall at any rate believe in the Devil. None but a friendly devil could have done me such a good turn."

Setting the light on a little table near the pillow, he sat down to wait till she should recover her senses. The pleasure of now having it in his power to wreak a bitter and protracted vengeance brought a rush of blood to his face, and lighted up his eyes with so savage a gleam that they seemed to emit sparks of electric fire. Never, surely, did human countenance wear a more repulsive aspect; to his natural disfigurement being now superadded the sinister expression of contemplated crime. Too painful is the picture presented to us! on the one hand Ginevra pale, motionless, grief imprinted on every lineament, in an attitude of languor

and prostration; and on the other Valentino, such as we have described him.

For some time the situation remained unchanged; and Ginevra might, indeed, have been esteemed happy so long as her wandering senses and downcast lids preserved her from all consciousness of her position, and from sight of the miscreant who, henceforth, was absolute master of her destinies; but this good fortune was not of long duration, and some slight movement made Cesar Borgia aware that his victim was about to open her eyes. In that place, and at that hour, he was free from all human restraint; beyond those vaults, screams would be inaudible while the fête was at its height. So relying on his immunity, as time was no object, he proposed to enjoy, at his leisure, his wonderful piece of luck.

At length the lady's garments were stirred by the heaving of a deep sigh. She opened her eyes for an instant, and immediately closed them again; she opened them a second and a

third time, and then began to fix then on the unknown face which she saw glaring at her; but it was only in a mechanical sort of way that she saw him, for the sight conveyed no distinct idea to her mind. After a time she became affected with an uneasy sensation at the vision of that ill-favoured countenance, and she turned away slowly, with such a pathetic gesture, that it would have moved anyone else to compassion. Her first recollection, on regaining her senses, was of Fieramosca in the arcade at the feet of Donna Elvira. "Oh, Ettore!" she murmured, "then it was true, and thou hast betrayed me!" Then pressing the palms of her hands over both brow and eyes, she lay without moving for several moments. At the sound of that name, Valentino's lips contracted with a smile of rage.

Ginevra only just then remembered that she should have been in her boat, and as she raised herself on her elbow to try and sit up, she felt the softness of the bed. She opened her eyes

in a fright, saw the Duke, and gave a scream which was stifled by his seizing her by the throat and thrusting her backwards.

"Don't scream, Ginevra," said he, "it would be only waste of breath. I am so glad you have come to see me, and I will soon restore you after the discomfort of your voyage at this untimely hour. True, you were not looking for me; but what of that? The best laid plans sometimes miscarry."

Poor Ginevra felt her heart sink and strength fail as she listened to this speech. She had not seen the Duke for a long time, and though she retained some vague recollection of his face, she failed to recognise him, and experienced nothing but horror at his appearance. With a sense of her utter helplessness, she only faltered: "Who are you? Have pity on me! What do you want? Leave me."

The Duke rejoined: "Do you remember, Ginevra, how you behaved, some years ago, to someone who was then desperately in love

with you, and would have showered on you gifts and caresses without stint? do you remember that you treated him worse than a dog? Have you forgotten that you mocked at his love, that you spurned his offers, and clothed yourself with a pride which would have been unbecoming in a queen? Well, do you know who he was? I am he! And do you know who I am? Cesar Borgia."

This name fell like a weight of lead on poor Ginevra's heart, crushing out all hope. So she made no answer, but gazed spell-bound at the Duke, much the same as if she had been in the claws of a tiger; and it would never so much have entered her head as to try and propitiate him with words.

"Now that you know who I am," continued the Duke, "you may judge if you have much compassion to expect from me; however, I might so far relent as to let you off, without taking the vengeance on you which I might, nay, ought. But on the condition, Ginevra, that

you show a little sense. And you will find it called for, I assure you."

These somewhat less harsh words could not but awaken a spark of hope in the lady's mind; and with clasped hands, while she strove to disguise the repugnance with which he inspired her, she began to implore him, as men pray before the Crucifix, to spare an unhappy woman whose case was already sufficiently miserable.

"I conjure you, Sir, by that day when you, though so powerful on earth, will have to stand with your soul bare, before the Eternal Judge! If any woman dear to you were ever to fall into an enemy's hands, and were to plead in vain for mercy,—if your mother or sister were to be in my present evil plight, and were to pray, and pray in vain, would you not cry to heaven for vengeance against anyone who wronged her?"

These words, which connected the idea of virtue with the names of Vannozza and Lu-

cretia Borgia, only moved Valentino to laughter, as he knew something about them. But it was a sinister laugh, which boded ill to poor Ginevra.

In the meanwhile, Don Michele, who was returning discomfited and empty-handed, in dread of his master's displeasure, reached the foot of the Castle, saw Ginevra's boat as well as the messenger's ashore at the Duke's door, and immediately had his suspicions aroused. He landed, approached the entrance, and hearing a noise within, thought some untoward accident had happened. He pushed the door, found it fastened, and would certainly not have been reassured had not Cesar Borgia's voice, calling out "Wait!" shown that he was in no danger. He put his ear to a crevice in the door, unable to imagine the reason why it was not opened to him. After a short pause, during which reigned the deepest silence broken only by noise from above, distant shouts and the gurgle on the shore of the waves, which were

gently propelling the two boats into contact with one another, Don Michele, who was listening most intently, heard, all at once, the Duke's voice exclaiming, with a burst of laughter:

"Pray to God and the Saints, and welcome!"

Then followed the sound of his approaching footsteps, and Don Michele had only just time to draw back from the door as the Duke turned the key, and came out.

Don Michele instantly began to excuse himself, but was interrupted.

"You can make your report some other time; at present I know a good deal more than you about the matter."

This speech might have led the agent to believe that his master was displeased with him, had he not gathered both from his face and tone of voice that there was no further call for his intervention.

Valentino, turning to the men who had come with Don Michele, said: "Quick! all of you

to the boats, and wait for me below Santa Orsola." Then to the latter: "And you come with me."

The former set off rowing, and were soon out of sight. Don Michele and the Duke entered his rooms, and soon returned, bearing between them the inanimate form of Ginevra, whom they replaced in the boat where she had been found.

This done, the messenger was summoned from the room at the end of the passage. They all three stepped into his boat, without a word on either side; and as soon as they rejoined the one which had been sent on before, they exchanged into it.

The Duke sat down in the poop, and Don Michele stood up in front of him. Although he now knew why his lord was indifferent as to the failure of his *coup de main*, still he wished to inform him of the reason why he had returned empty-handed; so he related to him in detail his whole plan of operations, their

resistance to the boarding party, and the recapture from them of their prey.

"One of them, however, has fared badly," added he, pointing behind him towards Pietraccio who, as we have already said, had been caught on the head by an oar, and had fallen down stunned in the boat, where he had remained a prisoner. By this time he had recovered, and was sitting rather more than a yard away from the Duke. The men had believed him to be more dead than alive; and as escape was an impossibility, they had left him to his own devices.

"That villain," continued Don Michele, "jumped into the boat like a madman; but Rosso gave him a crack on the ear which settled him. I thought he was dead; but he seems to be coming round."

In the course of Don Michele's report, remarks had been made from which Pietraccio gathered that the object of his hitherto vain researches was now before him.

Valentino noticed that the wounded man was rolling his eyes and watching him with a malignant expression. This made him suspect that he was devising some mischief, and so was about to give an order to have him thrown to the fishes.

Don Michele, also, (who, if the reader recollects, had heard the last words of the assassin's mother in the prison of Santa Orsola, and her exhortations to him to seek for vengeance,) kept his eyes furtively on him, and became convinced that he was on the point of making some desperate attempt. The Duke's agent, though serving him for the sake of the great advantages he derived from his patronage, would nathless have rejoiced if, by some unsuspected connivance, he could have succeeded in wiping off a long outstanding score.

The reader may easily divine the nature of Don Michele's feelings towards his patron when he is informed that the woman whom he saw

expire before his eyes in the tower was none other than his wife.

When, as one result of the encounter with Fieramosca and his comrades, Pietraccio had fallen into his hands, he hastily set his wits to work to sketch out some project for making use of him as a tool to revenge himself on his lord. But the time had been too short for him to mature any plan; and still undetermined, he only resolved not to let slip any opportunity that might offer itself; and at this moment, events seemed about to shape themselves according to his wishes. In fact, Don Michele's last words were followed by an interval of silence which sufficed for the young man to put in execution a desperate venture. He rose from his seat, passed Don Michele—who made a feint of arresting him—and fell, tooth and nail, on Valentino, thinking to tear him to pieces like a wild beast. But the Duke, who had his misgivings, was ready to receive him; and Don Michele had hardly time to seize him

by the shoulder before he fell dead from his grasp, pierced with the poniard which the Duke wore in his girdle, and which in this emergency he had used with incredible rapidity.

The whole affair had passed so instantaneously, that when the rowers turned round at the noise, it was all over; and as they rested on their oars they saw Valentino replacing the dagger in its sheath, as he kicked the corpse, and desired it to be thrown overboard.

"Fool! villain!" exclaimed Don Michele, professing great concern for the peril the Duke had incurred. "However, no one will persuade me that that man was not something different from what he appeared to be. I found him, a few days ago, confined with his mother at the bottom of the Convent tower; the officers of justice had taken them both prisoners with a band of assassins. The mother died of wounds she received in defending her-

self. She gave her son a necklace, telling him with her dying breath some story about it. . . . oh! now I remember . . . telling him she had received it from her lover at Pisa. Anyhow . . . wait, Rosso, before you throw him into the sea; I want to see if he has still got it round his neck. It is a pity, at any rate, to cast gold to the fishes."

So saying, he unbuttoned the young man's corset, found the chain, and handed it to the Duke who was listening intently to what he was saying.

Taken thus by surprise, Valentino was thrown off his guard, and could not dissemble the shock which this sight occasioned him. For an instant he was unnerved, and his clasped hands, which held the pendant jewel of the necklace, dropped powerless on to his knees. He resumed his seat, and a second time, in a faltering voice, ordered the body to be cast into the deep. He turned his head aside, but the plunge which he heard in the

water, and the splash which came into the boat, made him aware that he had been instantly obeyed. Then tightening his grasp on the chain, he flung it to a distance, and wrapping his cloak around him, he leant his head on his hand and subsided into silence.

Don Michele, feigning respect for his preoccupation, moved away and sat down among the rowers, and they all proceeded amid a general hush. Nor was aught heard during the rest of the voyage save the noise of the water dripping from the oars as they dipped in and out of the sea. Valentino's tool was enjoying a revenge which probably no one else in the world had ever achieved. He had succeeded in awakening memories in that man's heart which were near akin to remorse; that remorse which, unmitigated by a single ray of hope, resembles the despair of hell. This was a great feat for Don Michele to have performed. Fully alive was he to his triumph, and keenly did he relish it.

After these incidents, they continued on their course till they reached the ship that was waiting for them, and immediately set sail for Romagna.

We now take a final leave of these reprobates.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.—Cesar Borgia soon met with his deserts. Two months later, his father Alexander VI. died; thereupon he was despoiled of all his possessions by the succeeding Pope; became as servile as he had hitherto been insolent; was carried prisoner to Spain; escaped, after two years' captivity, to Navarre; and was killed in 1507 in an assault on the Castle of Biano.

CHAPTER V.

PEACE AT LAST.

"He was thy hope, thy joy, thy love, thine all,
And that last thought on him
Sufficed to kill;
Burst forth in one wild cry—and all was still.
Peace to thy broken heart!"

Bride of Abydos.

Observed but by a few, the departure of Fieramosca and his friends from the ball had in no wise interfered with the general gaiety. Fanfulla, hastily and unheeded, retired from the terrace, the scene of his interview with Donna Elvira, doffed his friend's attire, then returned

and mixed with the dancers as though nothing had happened, chuckling to himself over the practical joke he had so successfully perpetrated, and dying to disclose it. She, for her part, looked out for Ettore amongst the crowd, and, seeing nothing of him, could not conceive why he was holding aloof from her.

An hour having thus sped by, Inigo and Brancaleone were seen to enter and ask the first whom they met for Consalvo. He was pointed out to them in a corner of the hall, where he was standing in the midst of a group of French barons. They accosted and drew him aside; informed him of the recent occurrences, explained how they had discovered that Valentino was in the Castle and that he was the author of these outrages, and requested his authority to take some steps in the matter. Consalvo, who considered him quite capable of these enormities, and of even greater if they served his turn, hesitated for a moment, then told the two young men to follow him, and

bent his steps towards his apartments. As he moved off he saw Don Garcia, and beckoned to him to accompany them.

In order not to break faith with the Duke, he would not admit that he was in the Castle; but on reflecting that he had taken leave that same day, and mentioned that he should start that night, it appeared strange that he should have chosen that last moment to make such a commotion. Anyhow, Consalvo determined to clear it up. So girding on his sword, and preceded by two lights, he went forward through a passage which led to a small spiral staircase by which they descended, unlocking two iron doors which closed the entrance. Another door remained to be opened. He stopped, and in a low voice desired the rest of the party to wait for him without making any noise, and not to come unless they were called. Then he unfastened the door, and went down into the Duke's chamber which he found deserted, in darkness and the greatest confusion; here

a chair, there a table overturned; near the bed a lamp upset, and the oil spilt on the floor, the adjoining rooms empty. Thereupon he summoned the others, and, after pondering a minute, said:

"I would not run the risk of an outrage being committed on some innocent person for the sake of keeping faith with a scoundrel. So I must inform you that for several days past the Duke has occupied these rooms. He was to leave either to-morrow or to-night. More I cannot tell you, for I know nothing more. We are all convinced that he is capable of any villany; so he may very well be at the bottom of this one. Therefore act as you think best; follow him, if you like, I give you free permission. And you, Diego, assist them as far as lies in your power."

It immediately struck Inigo to look out seawards and observe if there were any boat visible, in the bay, which might perchance be his; but being unable to see anything through

the panes, in order not to waste time in unbarring those heavy windows, he ran to the postern which opened on to the before-mentioned strip of beach, and of the existence of which he was aware, being familiar with all the inns and outs of the fortress. As soon as he had passed through, he saw the little boat, and prostrate at the bottom an unknown female form which he immediately conjectured to be that of Ginevra.

A loud shout having brought his comrades on the scene, they all stood round, at a loss what to think about her forlorn condition and presence in such a locality. With all possible care, they carried her in and laid her on the Duke's bed which was all in disorder, but which they arranged as best they could. And Consalvo, commiserating the unfortunate creature whose bruises, torn hair, and scratched and bleeding face told a piteous tale, went off hastily in quest of some woman into whose charge he could commit her.

Anxious that the matter should not be divulged prematurely, as he was quite in the dark as to what had happened, he thought he might venture to confide in Vittoria Colonna whose discretion was well known to him. He found her in the ball-room, and quietly conducted her to Ginevra's bedside; informing her, on the way, of what had occurred, and of the pressing need, in this exigency, of her good offices on behalf of the hapless creature who was an utter stranger to them. Vittoria Colonna, ever high-minded and warm-hearted, eagerly and thankfully accepted the charge. As soon as she reached the lady's couch and had scanned her features for an instant, she proceeded to set the bed-clothes in order, arrange the pillows more comfortably, and place her in an easier position, performing all these offices with that thoughtful and intuitive tenderness peculiar to womankind, which sex Providence seems to have instituted as the special dispensers of its consolations to the afflicted.

Ginevra's condition was one of lethargy and complete prostration, the effect of all the sufferings she had undergone. It could not be said that she was altogether either conscious or unconscious. She lay still just as she was placed. If anyone moved her arm or head, she was simply passive and did not appear to notice it. Her eyes were wide open, but lustreless, and she stared about vacantly. Vittoria understood that this very quiescence was a bad sign; she knew that there was no time to be lost, so she dismissed the men and sent for some of her women who brought spirits and cordials, and by the administration of these they soon succeeded in restoring suspended animation.

The first indication she gave of having resumed the use of her faculties, was to gaze around with a terrified expression, then to throw herself precipitately out of bed and try to make her escape. But so great was her weakness, that she would have fallen to the

ground, had not Vittoria caught her in her arms and with gentle violence put her back on the bed.

"Ah me!" wailed Ginevra, "are you all in league against me? Yet you seem to be a noble lady; you are young and beautiful, and you even will not take pity on me!"

"On the contrary," answered Vittoria, taking her hands and pressing her lips on them, "we and all in the Castle are at your service, to help and defend you; calm yourself, for Heaven's sake, for you have nothing to fear from anyone."

"Well, then, if it be so," implored Ginevra, again thrusting her feet out of bed, "leave me, and let me go."

Vittoria, ascribing her desire for flight, notwithstanding her weak and disfigured condition, to a disordered intellect, tried to coax her to have patience for a while. But her horror of the place had become a mania which was only intensified by opposition; so she con-

tinued to struggle, and said, weeping, "Madam! for the sake of the Holy Virgin, all I ask of you is to be removed from this couch: throw me into the sea, or into the fire, only take me away from this couch! I will not trouble you for much . . . only for a drop of water . . . for I feel on fire . . . and procure me speech with Fra Mariano of San Domenico . . . but let us go away . . . let me go away." So saying, she rose from the bed; and Vittoria, seeing that her mind was so set upon it, no longer attempted to dissuade her; and not without considerable difficulty, she and her women almost carried her upstairs, and lodged her in a little secluded chamber where Consalvo had had a pallet set up. As soon as she was undressed and put to bed, she said, with a deep sigh:

"Lady, God, who knows everything, knows that I pray Him to reward you for your goodness to me. Holy Virgin, I thank thee! and you, lady, who have saved me from a death of

despair, I only beseech you to be quick and send for Fra Mariano . . . Tell me what o'clock is it . . . is it day or night? . . . I am quite bewildered."

"It is the fifth hour of the night," answered Vittoria, "and Fra Mariano shall be fetched; but this fright you have had makes you more terrified than there is any occasion to be. Try and be calm; keep quiet, my dear girl. Here you are in a safe place; I will not leave you."

"Oh no! do not leave me! If you but knew what comfort your pitiful eyes bring my heart every time you look at me! Sit down here on my bed. There . . . I will draw a little nearer the wall . . . no, no, don't be afraid of making me uncomfortable. Indeed, I feel much better so." . . . After a pause, during which her mind seemed to wander, she was seized with a fit of shuddering, and frantically burst forth: "Oh, if you did but know the horror of it! to be buried alive . . . to be suffo-

cated under a heap of the grinning dead! Oh! I seem to be there still!"

Thus raving, she pressed up closer to her protectress, who, aware how futile it would be to argue with her, kissed and sought to soothe her with the tenderest caresses.

"Oh, lady!" continued Ginevra, hiding her head in her bosom, "I do not know what I am saying. I am sure I am talking nonsense. But I have gone through so much! . . . and I did not deserve it. . . . What had I done that he should have ill-treated me so? and the Blessed Virgin had promised to bring me through in safety. . . . I did so pray to her from the bottom of my heart . . . and after all to abandon me! It is true I was very wretched . . . but more unfortunate than guilty . . . oh, yes, infinitely more unfortunate! I know myself what my feelings were . . . but no one else knows what I have suffered!"

"Yes, dear, I believe it," answered Vittoria;

"but be calm, and do not say the Virgin has abandoned you. Don't you see she has sent me to wipe away your tears and to help you out of your troubles. Here I am beside you, and I shall not leave you. If that is all you want, don't be afraid of my deserting you. But if you stand in need of any further succour, if there is anyone who has injured you to be punished, if there is any wrong to be righted, speak . . . confide in me. . . . My father, Fabrizio Colonna . . . Consalvo . . . all, in fact, offer their services."

"Ah, lady!" interrupted Ginevra, "the whole world could not give me one moment's ease, nor diminish by one drop my cup of woe . . . all is over for me in this world . . . I thank you, however, oh! I thank you, because you have brought me some alleviation at the last . . . but do not therefore think me ungrateful if I do not tell you my story, it is impossible to relate it . . . and though I cannot accept your offers, may God reward

you for them. . . . He can. . . . I can only thank you, and kiss these blessed hands, which will support my head at the last and close my eyes when all is over. . . . Promise that you will not leave me till I am quite cold."

Vittoria tried to get her to dismiss such ideas, and to persuade her that her life was not in danger; but Ginevra stopped her.

"No, no, lady, it is useless; I know what has happened; I know how I feel. . . . Do not refuse me this favour, my blessed angel! Surely you will not deny it me? . . . There, you see I take advantage of your goodness . . . you cannot call me either proud or ungrateful. . . . So, will you promise me?"

"Yes, yes, dear; I promise you, if needs be."

"Oh! that makes me happier in my mind. Now send for Fra Mariano, and then I shall have done with all here below. Give me another drop of water, for my heart feels seared with red-hot coals. . . . If that candle

might be removed from before my eyes, for it dazzles me. Pray excuse my giving so much trouble, but it will only be for a short time."

Vittoria, after rendering her these trifling services, sat down again on the side of the bed, and shortly afterwards Inigo, who had gone to call up Fra Mariano, came to the door and asked if he might admit him.

"Let him come in, let him come in," exclaimed Ginevra.

There appeared on the threshold a friar of considerable stature, whose pallid and modest countenance was half shrouded by a hood. He approached the bed, saying, "Christ be with you, lady!" The others went out, and he remained alone with her.

This priest's bearing and manners (his whole being pervaded by an atmosphere of fervent charity resulting from his conviction that ministering relief to the woes of humanity was the most august and god-like of missions) betokened, even at first sight, that he had long

ago trampled under foot all mundane aims and affections.

His history was more or less a mystery to the inhabitants of Barletta and to the monks of the Convent of San Domenico, where, without occupying any particular charge of the Order, he lived, held in much reverence, partly on account of his virtues and the extent of his knowledge, and partly in consequence of the persuasion that he was the victim of a religious persecution. It was whispered that he had been, when a layman, one of the principal citizens of Florence, of the so-called sect of Piagnoni, the head of which was Fra Girolamo Savonarola; that, converted by the eloquence of that terrible preacher, he had given up the world and received at his hands, in St. Mark's, the habit of the Domenicans. With these facts, believed by everybody to be true, were mixed up other more uncertain reports; to wit, that he had broken a lover's vows in order to dedicate himself to God. It was said that the

sudden change had created great scandal, and provoked bitter indignation and revenge on the part of the woman he had deserted, through whose machinations he became involved in the persecution raised by the Court of Rome against the Friar. After the latter's death, he with difficulty secured a retreat, thanks to the care of his superiors, who effected his escape in disguise, and transferred him, under another name, to the monastery of Barletta where he was able to live unrecognised, as it was an out-of-the-way and unfrequented place.

These were the rumours in circulation about him. But the most sharp-sighted malevolence would, in any other respect, have sought in vain to tarnish his fame. The severe doctrines of Savonarola had fallen upon ground prepared to receive the seed; and in the propitious soil of his nature disposed to sacrifice everything to truth, they had brought forth the fruits of ardent zeal and charity.

The pyre on which his master had been re-

duced to ashes had, as it were, consumed the whole party. Fear of Papal vengeance had silenced those who detested the abuses of the Roman Court. Fra Mariano lived on tranquilly in his retirement, since God had not adjudged him worthy to die for the truth; happy in not being obliged to look on with folded arms at evils against which he was forbidden to raise his voice.

He sat down beside the lady's pillow, and asked if she wished to confess.

"Oh, yes, Father," answered Ginevra, "it is the only wish I have in the world; and if I had not felt life and strength ebbing away fast, I would not have disturbed you at this hour. But my time is short; so do not let us lose any, but help me to die in the grace of my Lord God and the Holy Roman Church."

"Life and death are in the hands of God," replied Fra Mariano, "and His will must be done. If, on your part, you do what lies in

your power, you need not fear that His support will fail you."

After making the sign of the Cross and reciting the prescribed prayers, he said to his penitent: "Now, say on."

To open her heart and make a full confession she had to go over, from the beginning, the story of her life, of her fatal marriage, of her supposed death, and of her wanderings from country to country. Her speech was disjointed and often interrupted by attacks of faintness, in consequence of her brain being too weak to sustain such a painful effort.

"Father," at last said Ginevra, "it is true for many years I have been much in the company of a man to whom I was not married. But my sin consisted in exposing myself to the temptation of evil-doing. God alone preserved me from falling into it. I neglected to look out for my husband and ascertain if he were really dead . . . at length I found him . . . and then I, at once,

resolved to return to him . . . I tried to do so . . . and, with the help of the Virgin, I hoped to succeed . . . but alas! instead, into what an abyss have I fallen?" And here she told Fra Mariano how, as the boat grounded at the foot of the Castle, she had witnessed the sentimental scene between Ettore and Elvira which had so overpowered her with grief, that she had fallen down in the boat, and only recovered her senses in Valentino's apartment; and having told her cruel story to the end, she burst into a desperate fit of convulsive weeping and incoherent speech, which showed only too plainly that her mind was fast becoming unhinged.

The good friar, stirred to the very depths of his soul, tried to pacify her with all the arguments which prudence and the urgency of the case suggested; but with only partial success; and even that, not until the paroxysm had yielded to exhausted nature, leaving her more prostrate and enfeebled than ever.

"Father," continued Ginevra, in a faint voice, "is it possible that God and the Virgin have rejected my tears and added to my sorrows a curse? God's vengeance has fallen, like a thunderbolt, on my head when He seemed to be promising me pity! . . . The punishment of my sins has already been immense . . . but I dread another still more tremendous . . . I fear that I shall die in despair of obtaining pardon . . . I feel that in these last moments, God is hardening my heart . . . that I am about to pass away, and that I can neither forget that man . . . nor pardon that woman . . . oh, pray for me! . . . help me! while there is yet time, talk to me of hope!" . . .

"Of hope?" interrupted the Brother; "do you not know that He who sends me to you, is that same God who purchased your salvation by His death on the Cross, who promises you mercy, and would promise it to you if you were laden with the sins of the whole earth, so long as you did not wrong His infinite

love by despairing of His pardon. And what demands does He make on you to give you a claim to it? to give you a claim to that crown of joy and glory that will know no end? He demands that you should love Him as He has loved you; that you should suffer a little for His sake, as He has suffered for yours; and forgive those who have trespassed against you, as He forgave all the torments, blows, outrages, and death itself which He endured. Behold Him in Heaven, yearning over you, waiting to gather you in His arms, and turn your weeping into boundless joy. The enemy, who held you to be his prey, cannot bear to see you about to escape from his clutches; he will try every means to recover you. He is trying to deprive you of hope, but he will not prevail over you. I, a Minister of the Eternal God (here he rose to his feet and, with a solemn gesture, extended his hands over Ginevra's head) swear to you by His holy name, that forgiveness of your sins, and your ever-

lasting salvation are recorded in His book of Life, if you can merit such a reward by a single act of love. May the divine blood of the Word descend like celestial dew into your soul; may it wash away every stain; may it infuse therein joy, peace, and grief for having offended Him who shed it for you; and may it endow you with strength to repulse and despise the assaults of the foe who seeks your ruin."

"Oh, Father!" exclaimed Ginevra impressed with veneration for the words she heard, "God speaks to me by your mouth. Then I may still hope that I shall not be cast away for ever?"

"No, blessed soul; the harder the fight so much more glorious will be the palm! But now that God gives you time and grace to acknowledge your faults and His mercies, think not of turning back, and remember what He says: 'It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from

the holy commandment delivered unto them!' 'No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God!' Are you powerless to banish the image of that man from your heart? See, where you had rested all your hopes, and from whom you were expecting joy and comfort! See, for whom had you despised the love of your Saviour? For one who could not even keep true to his earthly and sinful troth; who, at the first gust of temptation, turned aside to other attractions, heedless of his plighted faith to you. Thus the world keeps its promises! Notwithstanding, for the sake of its allurements, you slight the unfailing promises of the Eternal; and when, by the touch of His hand, He exposes the vanity of your desires, you are offended, instead of prostrating yourself before this miracle of love? Cannot you forgive that woman? How has she injured you? In the first place, she does not even know you; in the next, she is a maiden

free to entertain such thoughts without reproach. Oh! how much rather ought you to love her, and adore, in her person, the instrument which the hand of God employs for your salvation. I am a sinner too; I was so blind and unhappy as to seek for peace in creatures. God called me, I followed His voice, at first in bitterness; but in the sequel, what rich compensation has not divine goodness accorded me for such an insignificant sacrifice! What peaceful joy in loving, and feeling sure of a great and everlasting reward! Oh, believe me, blessed soul, for I am but a man and a greater sinner than you. I have put it to the proof; all is gall, uncertainty and darkness, except love to God, devotion to His service, and hope in His mercy."

"Oh yes," interrupted Ginevra, bursting into a flood of tears, "you have brought my sin home to me; you have subdued my hard spirit; yes, I forgive, and I forgive with all my heart, and I will give you a proof of it. Let

her come; let me see her before I die, and embrace her; and may they live together happily, as I trust God will take pity on me hereafter."

The friar fell on his knees beside the bed, and, raising eyes and hands to heaven, said: "*Variis et miris modis vocat nos Deus!* Let us adore the operation of His mercy."

After he had remained thus for a moment in prayer, he rose, gave her his benediction and absolution, and then resumed.

"Then you have really made up your mind to see her, and carry out this heaven-inspired purpose?"

"Yes, Father, send for her. I feel that I need to meet death in a forgiving spirit."

"And I, in the name of God, proclaim to you His forgiveness: already you are His. This holy intention is the sign of your salvation."

He was about to seek Donna Elvira when Ginevra called him back.

"One favour, Father, I have to ask of you;

and you must not deny me if you would have me die in peace. When I am no more, go to the French camp, find my husband (among soldiers he goes by the name of Grajano d'Asti, and is in the pay of the Duke de Nemours), tell him that in the last hour of my life I asked for God's pardon, as I also ask for his if I have offended him; tell him that in this sore extremity my soul is leaving my body as pure as when he received me from my father; tell him not to curse my memory, but to have a mass said for the good of my soul."

"A benison light on you! . . . be easy in your mind, your wish shall be carried out."

"One more favour I would ask of you," pursued Ginevra, "I know not if it be right or wrong . . . but God, who sees my heart, knows I mean well . . . I would have you seek him out also. . . . Ettore Fieramosca, I mean, who is one of Signor Prospero's free-lances . . . tell him I will pray for him, and that I forgive him . . . that's to say

. . . no, don't say anything to him about forgiveness . . . after all, I am not very sure . . . it might have been someone else like him . . . no, no, only tell him to think of his soul . . . that I now know how much we were in the wrong . . . tell him to consider the life to come, and that this one passes away like smoke, and that the message is sent him by one who is about to prove it, and wishes . . . and let him think of his true welfare. Tell him besides, that if God, as I trust, will receive me into His mercy, I will pray for him that he may be victorious in the tournay, and that the honour of the Italian arms may be worthily upheld."

Fra Mariano sighed, and said: "That also I will do."

The dying woman remained awhile silent, till there flashed across her mind a recollection of Zoraide her protegée, towards whom, in these latter days, she had harboured vindictive feelings. She entreated the friar to visit her in

the Convent of Santa Orsola, and, together with her last salutations, to convey to her a necklace and beg she would wear it for her sake. She commended the poor waif to his care, requested that he would provide her with an honourable refuge, and, above all, try and convert her to Christianity; after which she continued:

"One further charity I ask at your hands, and you will surely grant it. Have me buried in the subterranean chapel of Santa Orsola, clothed in the habit of the Convent. It is a consolation to me to think that I shall lie in peace near that image of the Virgin who has, at length, heard my prayers and put an end to my misery."

"Very well," said Fra Mariano, hardly restraining his tears, "your wishes shall be carried out in every respect."

So saying, he went out, called in Vittoria Colonna, and addressed her himself, in order not to allow Ginevra, whose breath was fast

failing, to exhaust herself with too much talking.

"Lady, I beg of you to look for Donna Elvira and bring her here. This poor young woman would like to say a few words to her."

Vittoria was surprised, and hesitated for a moment; however, she went her way without answering when Ginevra said: "Excuse my giving you so much trouble, but there is no time to lose."

It was about 4 o'clock, and the ball had broken up a few minutes previously; the rooms were emptying fast: the guests were streaming down the grand staircase accompanied by the barons of the Spanish army.

Consalvo had just taken leave of the Duc de Nemours and his knights, who, having mounted their chargers, were returning to the camp by torchlight.

The Castle resounded throughout with the noise and shouts of the throng of people who,

on foot or horseback, swarmed in the court-yard. The women, as was the custom of the century, rode pillion behind the men of their company; and the crowd and noise gradually decreasing, in a short time the court became untenanted, except when some servant passed through on business. Doors were heard to open and shut; lights were seen flitting about in the galleries and past the windows; and at last, when the clock struck six, the gate-keeper raised the drawbridge that communicated with the piazza, and to the rattling of the chains which supported it, succeeded an uninterrupted silence for the rest of the night.

Vittoria, meanwhile, had passed through the rooms where they were putting out the lights and setting the furniture in order; she reached the room to which Donna Elvira had already retired, and where she was taking off her ornaments and ball-dress, attended by two hand-maidens, whose ministrations, judging by the pettishness of her manner to them, did not

seem to be giving satisfaction. She was heated, flushed, and apparently far from satisfied with her evening. Conscience-stricken at the sight of Vittoria, she expected that she was about to be taken to task, and was not at all in the humour to put up with it. This notion induced her to receive her friend with a show of surprise which did not completely mask her impatience. Vittoria noticed it, but gave no signs of having done so, and, with all gentleness, begged her to put off going to bed for a quarter of an hour and to accompany her to Ginevra who was asking for her. She was, consequently, obliged to explain how she came to be there; and Consalvo's daughter, who, like many volatile girls, was in the main good-hearted, acceded all the more readily, as she saw matters were taking a more satisfactory turn than she expected.

So they went together to Ginevra's room and approached the bed. Donna Elvira's beauty, now when *en déshabille* her long golden

tresses were allowed to float unconfined over her neck and shoulders, was even more striking than when her dress and hair were arranged with studied care. Fra Mariano lowered his eyes, and poor Ginevra quivered all over as she gazed at her, and heaved a sigh to which the good friar could not refuse his sympathy. The three women preserved silence for some minutes; then Ginevra raised herself on her elbow, and said:

"Lady! you must be astonished at my boldness in disturbing you, being, as I am, an utter stranger to you; but in an extreme case, such as mine, anything is pardonable. I must ask your leave before I speak more openly. Am I at liberty to say a few words? Whatever your answer, it will soon be buried with me in the tomb; but may I speak in the presence of this lady, or would you wish us to be alone?"

"Oh!" said Donna Elvira, "this is my dearest friend, and she loves me much better

than I deserve; so pray speak out, my dear lady, for I am here to listen to you."

"Well, then, since you give me leave, I only want to ask one question." But here she paused for an instant, as if to gain strength and frame the sentence which she knew not how to begin. In all sincerity had she resolved to forgive the rival who had been the unwitting cause of such desperate grief to her. But who would be so severe as to cast it up as a reproach to the unhappy creature, if, when on the point of having the evidence of her eyes confirmed, and of being assured that it really was Ettore whom she had seen at Donna Elvira's feet, she shrank with invincible repugnance from having the doubt cleared up? Who would have the heart to condemn her, if she still cherished an undefined hope that she had mistaken someone else for him, and that he was still the Ettore of old times?

However that may be, we must confess to a belief that these feelings were not entirely

dead within her, and hence arose the short hesitation which produced that pause.

However, at last she said resolutely, and in a clear and distinct voice: "Tell me, then, and forgive me for venturing to take such a liberty, were you not, last evening, about 3 o'clock, in the gallery which overlooks the beach, and was not Ettore Fieramosca at your feet?"

The two girls, though on different accounts, were struck dumb by this question, equally direct as unexpected; Donna Elvira's face became as red as fire, and she stood incapable of uttering a single word. Ginevra, who was watching her countenance intently, understood it all, felt her blood curdle, and resumed in an altered voice:

"Lady, I know I am too bold, but, you see, I am dying, and I implore you, by the pardon for which we all hope in the next life, not to deny me this favour; tell me, was it you? was it he?"

Donna Elvira felt in a dream; she cast a

timid glance on Vittoria, betraying in her looks how much she stood in awe of her severity; but the latter, conscious that this was not a fitting time for its display, kissed and reassured her without a word.

Ginevra's life seemed to be slipping away with her doubts still unsolved; so, extending both her trembling hands towards the damsel, she cried out in a fit of desperation: "Well, then?"

Donna Elvira, terrified, pressed close up to her friend, dropped her eyes, and answered: "Yes . . . we were there."

Stricken to the very soul, Ginevra's face seemed to fall away suddenly, as a great change came over it. However, with an effort she sat up in her bed, took hold of Donna Elvira's hand, drew her towards her, threw her arms round her neck, and said: "God bless you, then, and make you happy."

But this last word was almost inaudible; and, perhaps before it was altogether pronounced, her soul had winged its flight to

heaven, there to receive the prize of the most arduous victory which a woman can achieve over herself, of the most magnanimous effort of which a human heart is capable.

Her arms, yet clinging round Elvira's neck, lost their strength and fell back, together with the body, lifeless on the bed. In a moment, her face assumed the hue and rigidness of death. The two girls were struck with it, and gave a cry. The priest for a few instants kept a breathless silence. At length, clasping his hands, he ejaculated: "Behold a vision of Paradise!" Then all three knelt down and prayed that her soul might enter into the rest of which it stood so sorely in need, and which it had so richly earned. They composed her hands over her breast, and Fra Mariano twined round her fingers the rosary which he wore at his girdle, placing a light at her feet as he pronounced the words "*Requiescat in pace.*" Then after silently raising his heart in prayer, first *for* her, and then, with a firm belief in her bea-

titude, *to* her in an appeal for her intercession, he conducted the two damsels away from that fatal spot, and afterwards returned to the bedside of the deceased where he passed the rest of the night in prayer.

* * * * *

One of Consalvo's principal motives in giving his consent to the challenges the issues of which were to be decided between the French and Spaniards, and between the French and Italians, had been to gain time for the arrival of the auxiliaries which he expected from Spain, and for want of which (on account of the inferiority of his forces) he had been obliged to remain shut up in Barletta without being able to attempt any enterprise of importance. However, during the course of the day, while he had been entertaining the French barons, despatches had been delivered to him announcing, as near at hand, the transports which had already rounded the point of Reggio, and might shortly be expected before

Barletta. Therefore, aware that it would not suit his purpose to let matters take too slow a course, and that it was not desirable to allow time for a reaction to set in amongst his troops whose spirits had been raised by the fresh arrivals, in discussing these rencounters with the Duc de Nemours and the French, he managed to persuade them to fix the earliest days possible. So it was decided that the Spaniards should fight, the day after the ball, on a tract of land by the sea, half a mile outside the gate which leads to Bari; and the Italians on the third day, on a spot which had been already viewed and approved by Brancaleone and Prospero Colonna, and was in the territory of Quarato, halfway between Barletta and the French camp.

The knights on both sides, informed of the decision by their respective chiefs, immediately turned their attention to their several rôles. The French who were to fight, left the ball and returned to the camp before the

others, so as to have time to make all due preparations for the battle; and the Spaniards likewise all retired to their lodgings to make ready and try and snatch a few hours' rest before morning. Inigo and Brancaleone received the news when on their way to fetch the friar after Ginevra had been removed to the room which she was never to leave alive; and the former, who was among the number of the combatants, was obliged (for the purpose of setting his affairs in order) to leave to his comrade the charge of finding Fieramosca, and seeing him safely through his troubles. They shook hands as they parted, Inigo remarking:

"How will he be able to fight, the day after to-morrow, when he cannot stand on his legs to-night?"

For sole response Brancaleone shook his head and bit his under lip, the expression on his face denoting that he was only too sensible of the truth of the Spaniard's observation. He started off down to the port, and jumped

into a boat, all eagerness to reach the Convent as quickly as possible and inform Ettore, as he had promised, of the result of their researches.

However, before we proceed to relate in what state he found his friend whom he had left in such a woeful plight, we must, anticipating the events of the following morning, notify the upshot of the Spaniards' engagement.

The sun had risen about an hour, when the two companies of men-at-arms (eleven on either side) met on the field. Among the Spaniards the most renowned were Inigo, Azevedo, Correa, old Segredo, and Don Garcia di Paredes; and the others, though less known, were all good men-at-arms and excellent horsemen. Pedro Navarro had been deputed by Consalvo to act as Marshal of the Lists. On the French side this office was filled by Monsignor della Palissa, who counted among his warriors Bayard, the chief ornament of the chivalry of those times. For a long time the combat

was maintained with equal fortune on both sides: Segredo, at last, had his tightly-drawn reins severed by a sabre-cut, whereupon his horse bolted furiously out of the field. This contingency, provided for by the laws of duelling, was considered tantamount to defeat, and anyone who incurred this disaster was obliged to yield himself prisoner. Good Segredo, seeing that his horse was about to carry him beyond the barriers, which were marked out all round by large blocks of stone, threw himself off; and though he fell on his knees, partly from the awkwardness of the jump, and partly, perhaps, because his agility had been somewhat impaired by advancing years, still he made a stout defence against two mounted men who set upon him. But his sword flew in pieces, and having no other weapon, and being too far from his own party to take refuge in their ranks, he was compelled to surrender and retire from the field. However, he had behaved with so much gallantry

that he won universal applause and sympathy for his misfortune. After this accident, the tide of success seemed to take a turn in favour of the Spaniards. The French had had several horses killed; and here it is well to inform the reader that, in spite of the ancient rules of chivalry, it was often customary to come beforehand to an agreement about wounding the chargers, in order to make these challenges a more real image of war where this courtesy was now seldom, if ever, practised; and also to give greater scope to the address of the combatants. After the fray had lasted about two hours, the Marshals desired the trumpets to be sounded so as to allow the combatants a short breathing-time. The Spaniards were all still mounted, and Segredo was the only one missing. Only one Frenchman had been obliged to give himself up as prisoner, and in that respect they were equal, but seven of their horses lay dead on the field; Bayard was still in the saddle. After half an hour's rest, the combat was

resumed, and notwithstanding all the Spaniards' efforts, their enemies maintained their position entrenched behind the bodies of their horses, over which those of their adversaries refused to pass, in spite of the most furious spurring. So after repeated unavailing attacks, a proposition was made by the French that the struggle should be relinquished, and equal honours adjudged to both.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVE OF THE FRAY.

"She is safe." "Where? where?" "In heaven."
Siege of Corinth.

"Coming events cast their shadows before."
Lochiel's Warning.

THE obstinate defence of the French, and the difficulty of dislodging them, fenced in as they were by the bodies of their horses, had the effect of inclining the majority of the Spaniards to lend an ear to their proposal. But Diego Garcia would not hear of it. Furiously, he called out to his comrades that they ought to be ashamed of retreating before half-beaten

men, and that they must fight it out to the end to prove the superiority of the Spaniards on horseback as well as on foot. As he could not reach them with his sword (his sole weapon) he stooped down, fuming, and picking up those huge stones which marked the boundary of the field, and which a man of ordinary strength could hardly have moved, he hurled them over into the midst of the hostile phalanx. But it was easy to evade the blows, so this mode of attack was not successful in inflicting very much damage. For all that, the onslaught was resumed and lasted till towards sunset, the French maintaining their resistance with such bravery that both sides were at last obliged to desist. The arbiters decreed the honours of the day to be equally divided, and pronounced the French to be the staunchest, and the Spaniards the most skilful. The two prisoners were exchanged; and all, weary, vexed, and bruised, wended their way, some to the camp and others to the town.

When the Spaniards made their entry it was almost night. They dismounted at the Castle, presented themselves to Consalvo, and gave him an account of their performance. The Great Captain was moved to wrath, and upbraided them with not having left off as well as they began. On this occasion, Don Garcia's noble nature shone forth conspicuously. He, who in the field had bitterly reproached his colleagues with submitting to the award which declared the battle to be a drawn one, now, in Consalvo's presence, boldly took up their defence, and vowed that they had done all that lay in the power of valiant men, and had accomplished what they had undertaken; viz. to make the French confess that the Spanish cavalry was quite equal to their own. But Consalvo, ill-brooking these excuses, cut him short with the retort, "*Por mejores os embiè yo al campo*,"* and dismissed them.

We now take up the thread of our narrative

* "I sent you to the field as being the best."

at the point where, the previous evening, Brancaleone parted with Inigo to return to Fieramosca.

As he landed at the island of Santa Orsola, the anxiety he had felt, on his way, to arrive as soon as possible, in a great measure abated when he began to consider what account he should give Fieramosca of Ginevra's adventures and of the condition in which he had left her. Slowly, he ascended the staircase which led to the Convent esplanade, and as soon as he had collected his ideas, approached the strangers' quarters. But the speech he had prepared was superfluous. As he entered the room, he saw Zoraide sitting by the bed making signs to him not to make a noise, and perceived that Ettore was sound asleep. He retired gently; while the damsel rose, tarried for a moment to look at Fieramosca, and having assured herself that he was in a peaceful slumber, she stole out on tip-toe and followed Brancaleone into an adjoining room.

"All is going on well," said Zoraide; "by to-morrow Ettore will be just as if he had never been hurt. But Ginevra, where is she? Have you found any traces of her?"

Brancaleone breathed again when he heard this good news of Fieramosca, and answered:

"Ginevra is in the Castle in good hands, and you can see her before long; but tell me, will Ettore be really cured? will he be able to fight the day after to-morrow?"

"He will fight all right enough."

A certain shade of mystery in Zoraide's manner excited Brancaleone's curiosity. He was told, in answer to his inquiries as to the precise nature of his friend's malady, that he had been slightly wounded in the neck, but she made no mention of the poisoned dagger. Still, thinking her expressions somewhat peculiar, he continued to press her with questions, but failed to elicit any clearer explanations.

"There is a fable amongst us in the East," said Zoraide, with a melancholy smile, "which

tells of a lion of the desert whose life was saved by a mouse. I will tell you nothing more; let it suffice you to know that in the course of a few hours Ettore's arm will possess the strength of a wild bull's neck. For the present, nothing can be done but to leave him quiet; to-morrow he will wake up in plenty of time to get ready. I must return to him to be at hand when needful. Have confidence in me; I am a mistress of the art of healing, and I have cured more dangerous wounds."

Brancaleone, seeing that he could do nothing further for his wounded friend, charged Zoraide, as soon as he woke up, to make his mind easy on the score of Ginevra; to tell him that the fight was fixed for the ensuing day, and that he should come himself at noon to see after him, if he had not made his appearance in the town before that hour. With this agreement, he returned to Barletta, where, before going home, he wished to call at the Castle and hear how Ginevra was going on; but he found the

gate closed and the drawbridge raised, so he was obliged to defer his inquiries till the following morning.

He ran there as soon as it was daylight, and found that the eleven Spanish warriors had already started for the field, followed by all those who were at liberty to accompany them, so that very few were left behind. He went upstairs without meeting anyone he could ask; he came to the door of the room where he had left Ginevra the night before, and knocked. Fra Mariano, who had spent the night there, opened it, took Brancaleone into an adjacent room, and gave him an account of what had happened. He was all the more distressed at this melancholy news, because he could not help feeling that this affliction was about to befall his friend just when he was least prepared to bear it, and when he stood in need of all his strength for the impending conflict. He feared lest, bowed down under the weight of grief, he should, on the occasion of such an

arduous and momentous ordeal, prove unworthy of his high repute. With the view of averting such a misfortune, he arranged with the friar to conceal the death for the whole of that day, and to put off having the deceased conveyed (according to her wish) to the Convent till the following one when Ettore, with his companions, would be engaged fighting. They considered it would not be difficult to keep the secret for that one day, as the fortress was almost deserted, and they thought it best to disclose it to no one but Consalvo, who would afford them the necessary facilities for the transport of the corpse and for the befitting funeral ceremonies.

With regard to Fieramosca, to whom some explanation was inevitable, they agreed that Brancaleone should tell him that all was well with Ginevra, that she could not see him that day, but bade him be mindful of Italian honour and fight with all the courage beseeming such cause, and that she would pray for him and

his comrades—all which might be said with truth, and was calculated to comfort him and send him with a bold front to meet the foe.

As soon as they had concerted these most important measures, Brancaleone went down into the piazza and proceeded to the house of the brothers Colonna. He found them both in the courtyard, where they had assembled the thirteen Italians, and were minutely reviewing their arms, accoutrements, and horses, so that all should be in readiness for the morrow and nothing wanting to their proper equipment.

Brancaleone, who had notice of this rendezvous, had sent on both his own and Fieramosca's squires with the horses and arms. But their master was not forthcoming, and their sole answer to all inquiries was, that they had not seen him and knew nothing whatever about him.

Prospero Colonna heard this news with surprise, which quickly changed into wrath; so as soon as Brancaleone appeared, he asked with a severe countenance:

"Pray where is Fieramosca that he has not shown up?"

"Your Excellency!" answered Brancaleone, "he will be here directly; he is unfortunately delayed; unforeseen business of the greatest importance——"

"What can be of greater importance to him than to-morrow's affair? I would not have believed he could have given a thought to anything else."

Fanfulla, brimful of last night's adventure, and longing for an opportunity to talk about it, said, laughing:

"Perhaps he danced too much last night, or found some new attraction; and then one knows that too early rising is a bore——"

"A plague on you!" retorted Brancaleone; "do you think everyone is as mad as yourself? I tell you, your Excellency, you need not fear, he will be here shortly, on my honour; indeed, I will go myself and fetch him."

He thought this might perhaps be the safest

plan, because, though he trusted in Zoraide, he felt rather anxious lest some fresh obstacle might have hindered him. He set off towards the port to make another expedition to the island; but just as he had stepped into the boat and was pushing off from the shore, there appeared, from behind the mole, a little skiff in which, to his great joy, he perceived Ettore, who, as soon as he saw his friend, rowed towards him, jumped ashore, and immediately asked:

"Where is Ginevra? is she ill? what has happened to her? Quick! quick! let me go to her."

"Quick, on the contrary, to the Colonnas; they are all waiting for you. Ginevra is well, and you can see her afterwards."

"Well! thank God for it; but let us go to her."

"But did not Zoraide tell you that we are to fight to-morrow?"

"Yes, all right about the fighting; but now, for goodness sake, take me to Ginevra."

"You cannot see her now, nor at all to-day . . . "

"And I tell you . . . "

"But if you don't listen to me and won't let me speak, we shall never come to an understanding. . . . You must know, then, (and this is all a message from her; not that I have seen her, but she sent me word to tell you,) she is quite well; Signora Vittoria received and brought her round, and nursed her with the most tender care; she wants for nothing. She prays you to take no thought of any but the one thing to-day, nor attempt to see her; to compose your mind, and bear yourself worthily to-morrow as the champion of Italian honour; to remember all that you have so often talked over together on the subject, and that she will pray for our victory."

"But oh! why can I not see her? There must be something you are keeping back from me."

"And I tell you nobody is keeping anything

back from you. I really could not tell you, if I wished, all about yesterday's *fracas*, for I know nothing. But, for heaven's sake, be satisfied for the present to know that she is safe; you will be able to see for yourself after the battle; there is no time now to think of anything else. . . . Let us be off, for Signor Prospero and all the others are waiting, and have already been asking for you, and cannot understand your being taken up with other affairs at such a moment. . . . Come, pluck up a little spirit! be a man, as you have ever been! You seem to hold very cheap your honour and reputation as a great soldier!"

"Well, let us go, then—let 's go, then," answered Fieramosca, testily; I am not a horse, to want so much spurring as all that. I only asked to see her for a moment; would that have turned the world topsy-turvy?"

"The world is not turning topsy-turvy. . . . But don't you understand, they have all been there the last hour for the muster, and you

are the only one missing. . . . What must they think of you ?"

"Hold!" said Fieramosca, quickening his steps (for their pace during this discussion had been far from rapid, one wanting to go towards the Castle, the other trying to drag his comrade on to the house of Colonna); "come along! you are quite right . . . duty and honour before everything."

And as they strided hastily onwards, Brancaleone inquired:

"By-the-bye, how are you feeling? How about the wound?"

"Oh, it's nothing . . . but I will tell you afterwards . . . for there is no time now . . . most diabolical! And that poor Zoraide! she would not tell me anything, but I understood very well . . . by the torture I suffered . . . the dagger must have been poisoned. . . . I hope she did not suck the wound, even if my health or perhaps life depended on it . . . and I am very much afraid that is what she did.

But I was so wandering that I cannot be sure whether it were a dream or reality."

"But in point of fact, you feel well?"

"Just as though I had had nothing the matter with me."

So discoursing, they entered the courtyard and presented themselves before Prospero Colonna, who, after some curt remark on Fieramosca's delay, went on with his occupation. The attention which he devoted to the most minute particulars caused this review to last some hours. The horses were tried; the soundness of the armour was tested with lance, battle-axe, and sword; the temper of the offensive arms was proved on wood and iron, and the least perfect were rejected. Towards noon they all returned to their lodgings; Ettore alone was retained under pretext of settling various details relating to the challenge, but in reality not to leave him free to go his own way. Brancaleone had drawn Signor Prospero aside, explained matters to him, and begged him to

contrive to keep Fieramosca engaged for the rest of the day. This he most strictly did; and when towards evening he was allowed to depart, as no more excuses could be framed for detaining him, Brancaleone went home with him, and kept up such a running fire of comments on the military profession in general, and on their tactics for the morrow in particular, that he succeeded in thoroughly riveting Ettore's attention and effectually diverted his thoughts from the subject nearest his heart. As they were crossing the piazza, the standard of the Spanish champions hove in sight, and so engrossed did both become with the tidings of the day, that time slipped away, and the shades of night had already fallen before they retired home.

"Those devils of French have hard bones," said Ettore, taking leave of his friend, "and the Spaniards seem to have found them a tough morsel."

"So much the better," responded Branca-

leone, "we shall have to deal with men; and is it for nought that we belong to the Colonna flag? As for myself, I hope to-morrow to be a host in myself. Think what nuts it would be to those Orsini scoundrels if we were worsted! How that poltroon the Count Pitigliano would jeer! . . . but I hope he will not have that pleasure this time."

"Oh, no," replied Fieramosca; "and may be some of those French will repent of having wished to taste the figs of Apulia. Anyhow, let us now think of resting for the next few hours, and to-morrow we will show them that if we poor Italians always go to the wall, it is only our cursed luck that is in fault; and that man for man, we stand in no fear of them, nor, indeed, of anyone in the world. Adieu, Brancaleone. I know what you would say," he continued, smiling; "don't be afraid; till to-morrow evening I will think of nothing else but the matter on hand, and I swear, my blood boils more now than the day when the challenge

was given, and I trust to disgrace neither you nor Italy."

"I am more than certain of that," responded Brancaleone. "Till to-morrow, then."

"Till to-morrow," echoed Fieramosca, wringing his friend's hand, and they separated.

Before going up to his room, Fieramosca went to take a look round his stable, and proceeded to caress his war-horse with the affection, I might almost say friendship, which every soldier feels for the partner of his toils and perils. He passed his hand over its neck and shoulders, patting it gently; while the horse, laying back its ears and shaking its head, bit playfully at its master.

"Poor old Airone, eat, and be happy as long as you can, for you are not certain to sleep on this litter to-morrow night. . . . On any other occasion I would have taken Boccanera, and not have risked your skin; but to-morrow, I really must have you under me, for I can depend on you not to make a false step. And then,"

he went on, smiling, and taking its muzzle between his hands, "you are an Italian too, so you too must bear the cross."

After he had seen that everything was in proper order, he said, turning to his groom: "Masuccio, give him water at 4 o'clock, and, after that, cram him with as much oats as he will eat. At 5 o'clock come and arm me." After he had given these orders he went upstairs, and in a few minutes put out the light and went to bed with the firm intention of going to sleep. At first, he felt rather sleepy; but one thought obtruded itself, then another, and another; and so several hours passed without his being able to close his eyes for a second. On the faith of Brancaleone's representations, he had made his mind quite easy about Ginevra, but the whole case now appeared afresh to him in a dark and suspicious light; an undefined dread took possession of his heart. "What can be the meaning of all this mystery," thought he, "and about which I am to

be kept in the dark even to-morrow? Can Brancaleone be trying to deceive me?"

For one moment, he was tempted to execrate the challenge; but the impulse was strangled at its birth. "Oh, shame on me! for shame!" cried he, sitting up in his bed. "How could such a vile thought enter my mind? . . . Am I so altered from what I used to be? What would Ginevra say if she saw me so disgracefully changed, and grown so cold in a cause which would once have made my veins run with liquid fire?"

These reflections exasperated him to such a degree that he got up in a rage (for sleep being out of the question, bed was unbearable), dressed, and went out on to the terrace, where he sat down, as he often did, on the low wall under the palm, there to await the not far distant break of day.

The pale and waning moon was faintly mirrored in the sea. On the left, at about a distance of five hundred paces, loomed the

fortress which, as nothing could be plainly distinguished at that hour, looked like a large dark mass, the only clearly defined parts being the battlements on the towers which stood out against the background of the sky. Ettore sighed as he looked at those walls and thought of her whom they contained; and every now and then, he fancied he heard a distant hum of chanting responsories; but he was so far off that he could not be certain. At one window which he could only see fore-shortened, on account of its being in a butment of the Castle, there was a light which was kept burning all night long; he would have given his life-blood to see that light put out! Again and again he turned his eyes away, muttering, "What a fool I am to torment myself with such fancies!" Yet, for all that, he could not forbear resuming his gaze, and still the light was there.

With that sort of bad faith which a man often practises towards himself when haunted by a sore misgiving, he tried to persuade

himself of what in the bottom of his heart he did not quite believe; viz. that Ginevra was in good hands, that nothing untoward had happened to her, and that all the sense of mystery which disquieted him was nothing but a fancy of his own, the offspring of his own imagination; and if he took all these pains to deceive himself, it was because he felt that in order to devote the full powers of his mind to the coming struggle, he must perforce satisfy himself, if not of the certainty, at least of the probability, of what instinct told him was pure self-deception. "Oh, yes! yes!" said he, shaking his head, and rubbing his hands over his brow and hair, as if to disperse the thoughts which harboured there, "honour before everything! . . . and perhaps ere this time to-morrow I may have been able to say to her, 'Ginevra, we have conquered!'" Then musing for a minute, "Or perhaps she may have already seen me carried into Barletta on a bier, and may have said, 'Poor Ettore, thou didst all in thy power!' . . .

If that were to happen, I should have fallen like a brave man, and she would bewail my death; but she would not wish for my life at such a price as that of cowardice. On the contrary, she would feel pride in being able to say 'We have been friends since childhood.' Yet, even so, she will remain here forlorn and helpless. She does not even know that her husband is in the French camp; and if she did, how could she present herself to him after the lapse of so many years?"

Ettore had formed and partly executed a design of commending her to Brancaleone's protection; but as he reflected that he might be killed also, he resolved to write a letter to Prospero Colonna, intimating his intention of bequeathing to Maria Ginevra Rossi di Monreale all his property in Capua; to wit, a house and farm, his armour and horses, which collectively were worth several thousand ducats. He re-lit the candle, and the letter was soon written; then he thought of enclosing in it another one

to Ginevra, both as a farewell, and to set before her the young Saracen's claims on their gratitude; and as the cocks were beginning already to crow, and he heard the men moving about and making a noise in the stable below, time failing him, he only indited these few lines :—

"GINEVRA, I am just going to mount my horse, and I do not know whether I shall get off him alive to-night. If heaven has otherwise decreed, I doubt not that, after shedding some tears to the memory of one who from childhood has ever been your faithful friend and servant, you will rejoice that I have met with the finest and most glorious possible death. Be pleased to enjoy, for my sake, the few worldly goods I possess. You know that no one has any claims on me. I have no near relations. I only add a few words to commend to your care my servant Masuccio, who has been very helpless ever since the day he was wounded in the shoulder at Ofanto, and if you did not help him he might be reduced to beggary, which would be discreditable to my memory. One thing more I have to tell you. Your husband is in the pay of the Duc de Nemours. I have no more time. I hear the signal about to be given in Colonna's house. God be with you. Look after Zoraide.

"ETTORE."

In fact, the trumpeter was heard bringing out a few short disjointed notes with his lips, after the fashion of most of his craft, as though to test the trumpet preparatory to sounding the reveillée. A certain hum and confused noises proceeding from the ground floor of that and the adjoining houses, indistinct voices and the tramp of men and horses in the streets, all indicated that the greater number of those who intended being spectators or actors in the feats of arms were already afoot. However, there were no signs of dawn in the sky. Indeed, a thick mist hid the stars and charged the atmosphere with moisture.

Fieramosca, who was sitting by an open window closing his two letters, looked out and had his attention drawn to it, as the flickering ray from his candle irradiated the section of fog on which it fell. The dreary aspect of the weather increased the melancholy to which he was predisposed. The bats which, attracted by the light, flitted rapidly backwards and

forwards across the window, the sentinels posted on the castle towers, who as the hour approached for relieving guard, challenged one another in a somewhat lugubrious key, all, in fact, conspired to increase the gloomy influence of the hour and to add to the young man's dejection. But the heavy, resounding tread of two men, ascending the stairs and entering his room, made him raise his head and call up a bold and cheerful expression of countenance, so that his real state of mind might pass unnoticed.

Brancaleone, in complete armour, but with head bare, made his appearance, accompanied by Masuccio with Fieramosca's accoutrements. The bell of San Domenico was ringing for the mass which the combatants were to attend before starting for the field.

"Arm yourself, Ettore, for they will all be in church directly," said Brancaleone; and, with the assistance of Masuccio, in a few minutes he had sheathed his friend in the

gleaming and perfect suit of armour he was in the habit of wearing on great occasions. Forged by one of the best artificers of Milan, it so exactly fitted the knight's splendid limbs, and the joints were all linked together by such a masterly hand, that it followed each outline of the body without in any way impairing its grace, and left it at the same time free and unconstrained in all its movements. As soon as he was equipped and had hung his sword on his left and his dagger on his right side, they went down together and were followed by servants leading their horses and carrying their lances, shields, and helmets. In a few minutes, Prospero Colonna, the thirteen champions, and a great concourse of people were congregated in San Domenico.

The church was an oblong square, consisting of three naves, divided by pillars and pointed arches of a rude style; and towards the high altar two recesses, at each side, formed a cross with the principal body of the edifice. The

monk's choir, according to ancient custom, was situated in front of the altar; and the wooden partitions of the stalls were adorned with carvings in relief, to which time had imparted a dark burnished hue; in the middle a bench, sufficiently long for thirteen persons, was allotted to the Italian men-at-arms.

The shades of night were fleeing before the coming dawn, but still the light was not strong enough to penetrate through the painted glass with which the narrow windows were filled; consequently the interior of the church remained in almost total darkness, and the reddish glare from the few candles on the altar glanced only on the warriors' cuirasses, leaving all the other figures barely visible. Prospero Colonna, likewise in complete armour, stood a little in advance of the others with a handsome cushion at his feet for him to kneel on. It was of red velvet embroidered with a silver column, and had been borne hither by two pages who took up their station a few steps behind him. Fra

Mariano said Mass, and surely no noble or generous spirit present could have remained unmoved at the sight of these bold and valiant fellows bowing their faces furrowed by toil and warfare, in appeal to the God of Battles, to grant their swords victory over those who presumed to drag through the mire the good name of Italian chivalry.

The religious emotions that swayed them were expressed in their postures which, however, even in the act of prayer, betrayed some of that arrogance of bearing which is acquired by a long apprenticeship to arms. At the end of the bench, to the left, sat Fieramosca, upright and motionless, with his arms crossed over his chest. Opposite him, a few steps off, was the open door of the sacristy; and the church officials passing backwards and forwards in discharge of their several duties would alone have sufficed to distract his mind from prayer. But, in addition, a scene and dialogue supervened which were calculated

more than ever to turn his thoughts into a painful drift.

A man dressed in a dark tattered cloak, with rumpled red hair and an ill-omened face, was standing in the sacristy; and, addressing a Domenican friar (whose corpulent frame filled a leathern arm-chair which stood between two cupboards, the usual furniture of these places), he asked him, with uncouth gestures, and in a hoarse, cunning voice:

"Which am I to prepare, the pauper's or the gentlefolk's?"

"A nice question to ask!" answered the friar, as his lips moved, but no other part of his body. "Don't you know that Signor Consalvo is going to bear the expense of it? He is not one of those screws of Barletta who, to save giving the curate a taper, have themselves carried to the grave like paupers. First class, I have already told you. All first class—bells, catafalque, and chanted mass. You seem more stupid than usual."

The other shrugged his shoulders, and, going to one side of the sacristy, was lost to Fieramosca's view; however, he heard him put a key into a door and open it; then he distinguished a sound of receding footsteps, and, for some minutes, nothing more, until, after an interval, he heard the same steps returning, and also a noise as though something were being dragged along the paved floor. It came nearer and nearer, till the identical man reappeared hauling along, to the middle of the sacristy, a black bier embossed in silver, with a cross at the head, and at the feet a skull supported by two bones fixed underneath like a St. Andrew's cross. He threw a black velvet pall over it, after having first beaten off the dust with a cloth. While the sexton was performing this office in the ill-humoured and off-hand way so characteristic of his class, a cheerful idea seemed to well up from within to the surface, and pucker his cheeks with a grin.

"Then there will be something for me to

drink this time? It is long since any but mariners and fishermen have given us a job. Thank God, we come in occasionally for one of these gr . . . (here he turned round suddenly, as though afraid of being overheard, and lowering his voice, continued) great catches."

"It comes once to all," said the friar, cutting the sentence in two with a yawn.

"And, perhaps," continued the sexton, fitting the covering on to the bier, and drawing back a little to see that it did not hang down more one side than the other, "perhaps, after all, Brea, that witch of a wife of mine, did not make such a bad hit. Last night (just listen), we were in bed and talking about its being all play now and no work; and that the old woman's gown and the new doublet I bought with the money I pocketed during the plague were both falling to pieces . . . isn't it so?" (And drawing his sleeves over his elbows, he demonstrated the truth of his assertions.) "And in fact we were saying that if these things went on this

way much longer, we should be starved to death. Well, this morning, before Ave Maria, while I was getting up to go to church, 'Oh, Rosso,' says she, 'do you know what I dreamt?' Says I, 'What did you dream?' Says she, 'I dreamt that the kitchen in Veleno's inn was full of beds, and the yellow host was the yellowest of all. And, in fact,' says she, 'the plague had come back, and we were quite set up again, and you were going about Barletta dressed like a gentleman.' . . . And, indeed, Fra Bigio, between war and pestilence, don't you think there 's a chance for us? . . . And, perhaps, before to-night (here he again dropped his voice, and, seeing that no one in the church was paying any attention to him, he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder towards the thirteen champions), perhaps some of them will return to-night on four feet instead of their own two."

The friar, either from inattention or to keep up the dignity of the hierarchy, did not vouch-

safe an answer, so the dialogue came to an end. The sexton disappeared as soon as he had set everything in order, and the bier remained in the middle of the sacristy. It never occurred to Fieramosca to think for whom it was to be used; and if any suspicion of the sort had flashed across his mind, he would have dismissed it as a piece of folly; but notwithstanding, he could not withdraw his eyes from it during the rest of the service. His mind was naturally fixed on the one idea that this day might be the last one of his life, and he turned his spirit more fervently to God in prayer for the pardon of his sins. He went over again in his mind all the time which had elapsed since he removed Ginevra from Santa Cecilia; and the only thing with which he reproached himself was for not having told her that Grajano was alive. He had, however, confessed this and every other fault the night before. His conscience was at ease, and he felt that he could meet death boldly. As soon as mass was over,

the thirteen went out and followed Prospero Colonna to his house, where they sat down to table, in order not to enter the lists fasting.

Amongst other conditions settled between the French and Italian competitors was the following; namely, that every man-at-arms who should be made prisoner might, instead of having to follow in the train of his conqueror, ransom himself with his horse and armour for the sum of one hundred ducats. Each of the Italians consigned the money to Signor Prospero, and the thirteen hundred ducats were put in bags and packed on the backs of some mules which were to be driven on before to the field of action, and convey provisions and other possible necessaries.

When breakfast was over, they all adjourned to the Castle, where the great Captain was awaiting them in the ball-room. They took leave of him with few words and cheerful countenances. As he dismissed them, he announced that he should expect them to supper,

and should make preparations for twenty-six persons, so that if the French should forget to bring with them the money for their ransoms, they should not have to go to bed supperless. They descended into the courtyard, where their horses were drawn up in a line and held by grooms. They mounted, and rode off two abreast, preceded by trumpeters, and accompanied by a host of friends and a mob of gaping idlers.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TOURNAY.

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land?
* * * * *
The wretch concentred all in self,
Living shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung."

Lay of Last Minstrel.

At an equal distance from Barletta and the French camp, where the flat country begins to slope upwards into the mountainous, there lies,

embosomed in low hills, a plain which extends about thirteen hundred paces each way, and has probably been formed by some ancient alluvial deposit. The soil, consisting of fine gravel and silicious sand bound firm by the hand of time, is clear both of shrubs and grass, and affords a free course and good going for horses' feet.

This was the spot selected for the contest. The previous day, men had been sent, by both parties, to level any inequalities in the ground. The limits were marked out by a ridge, as well as by large stones set all round; and beneath the shade of some huge oaks, which grew on the top of a mound commanding a view over the whole lists, were placed seats for the umpires, under a striped red and white awning, which was bound to the branches of the trees. In front of this tribunal, the shields and lances of the men-at-arms of both nations were fixed in a row, in the sight of every one, and their names were inscribed in large letters on a placard. Curiosity had attracted, from the

neighbouring villages and country places, a great crowd of peasants and small gentry who had taken up positions on the adjacent heights before sunrise. Those of a certain position amongst them sat on the grass with the women and old men; the others, such as boys, poor people, and roughs, perched themselves on the trees, where the colour of their clothes and faces contrasted strongly with the green foliage.

The rich sylvan scene, enlivened by a multitude such as this, exuberant with life and motion, presented a fine spectacle to anyone standing at the extremity of the lists, turning his back towards the land, and face towards the shore. On the right, the grand clumps of holm oak reared their heads to the sky, the dark tint of their leaves blending harmoniously with the brighter and gayer verdure of smaller shrubs. On the plain beyond nestled the village of Quarato, no part of it being visible but the gate that was defended by a tower built up

against the rocks, round the foot of which wound the road. In the foreground were the lists; beyond them, the shores of the Adriatic, the town and castle of Barletta, and the reflection of the brightly painted houses in the blue sea; further off, the bridge and island of Santa Orsola, the high peaks of Gargano and the line of the horizon; then to the left, the gradually swelling hills; while just opposite the place appropriated to the umpires, on a rough bit of ground clothed with fresh herbage, stood a group of enormous oaks with ivy-clad trunks, and in the full vigour of the richest vegetation.

The mists which had risen in the night, now dispersing before the cold morning breeze, shifted about in the upper regions of the air, in clouds of fantastic form, which caught and refracted the golden rays of the rising sun. Other streaks of denser fog were hanging about the low lands, like beds of white cotton; while aloft were just visible the tops of high trees

and crests of hillocks. The disc of the sun, about to rise from the bosom of the sea, diffused an orange glow over the heavens, and left all terrestrial objects in a haze, merely lit up by the reflection from the atmosphere. All the spectators, involuntarily, turned their eyes towards the quarter where it was on the point of appearing. At length, on the extreme sea-line, there seemed to be generated, as it were, a spark of vivid light; it grew, took shape, and finally, the sun rose majestically, like a globe of fire, shedding abroad a radiance which imparted form and colour to surrounding objects, and cast a fitful shimmer over the surface of the sea.

A company of infantry had arrived early on the ground, and kept it clear from the mob which was scattered about in groups, principally affecting the spots where vendors of wine and comestibles had pitched their tents and set up benches and tables. Amongst these was our old acquaintance Veleno, mine host of the

"Sun," who had established his ambulatory traffic in the most conspicuous place, under an extemporised bower. He had already been patronised by several of his old customers among the soldiers. Two or three frying-pans were hissing on the fire over as many iron portable stoves. A table (composed of uneven boards propped up, in a rough-and-ready sort of way, by poles stuck in the ground, which acted as legs) was covered with baskets of fish, artichokes, and vegetables of every description for frying. He, himself, wearing a clean cap and two aprons, his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, and a flour-dredger tucked under his arm, stood, holding in one hand the plate of uncooked fry, and in the other the tongs for lifting it; while the whole time that he was busily preparing that favourite dish of the southern Italians, he never, for one instant, ceased chattering, laughing, asking and answering questions all in a breath, except when he, now and then, interrupted his flow of eloquence to sing

La Franceschina, or to cry out at the top of his voice, "Fine anchovies! fine anchovies! Mullets all alive, oh! Where are your eyes? Are your pockets empty?" and other such-like appeals to their purse-strings, that might have been heard half a mile away.

At length, a stir in the crowd which occupied the highest positions, caused all eyes to turn in that direction, and the news was passed from mouth to mouth that the French banners were already in sight. A few minutes afterwards, they appeared at a turn in the road which had been winding round behind a hill, and advancing, they drew up in battle array in the upper part of the lists facing the sea. The champions, with about a hundred and fifty friends and companions, dismounted, and left their horses in charge of their grooms, while they dispersed under the oaks on the umpires' platform, to await the arrival of the Italians. Judging by a cloud of dust on the Barletta road, which every now and then disclosed a

glimpse of flashing steel, the Italians were not likely to be much behindhand. The crowds, hitherto scattered about, now pressed forwards on to the boundary of the lists, and struggled to break through, in defiance of the foot-guards, who, however, kept at bay the wave which threatened to sweep them away, indulging, the while, in the amenities habitual to the soldiery of all ages on similar occasions, such as rapping the ground, and occasionally the toes of intruders, with the butt end of their pikes.

The Italians arrived, drew up in front of their adversaries in like order, dismounted, and they also betook themselves to the elevation on which the oaks were growing.

After an exchange of salutations and courtesies, Signor Prospero and Bayard, who were the two marshals of the field, proceeded to discuss preliminaries, and decided that the first thing to be done was to draw lots for umpires.

The reader will, I am sure, be surprised not to find the famous Bayard among the comba-

tants on such a momentous occasion, and to see him, instead, filling the office of marshal. It must be confessed that we were not less surprised than himself, and can only conjecture that he was unfitted for bearing arms by some imperfectly healed wound, or by the weakness consequent on an attack of the Quartan fever to which he was at that time subject; anyhow, we know for certain, he was not one of the champions.

An equal number of names, including French, Italian, and Spanish officers of both armies, were written on rolled-up slips and deposited in a helmet. The lots fell on Fabrizio Colonna, D'Aubigné, and Diego Garcia di Paredes, who, taking their places in the reserved seats, laid a volume of the Gospels open on a table before them, and received the oaths of the twenty-six warriors. These engaged to abstain from all foul play in fighting. They swore that they wore no charms about either body or armour; and that they were pre-

pared to face the ordeal in dependence only on their natural courage and personal strength. Again were read aloud the terms to which all had agreed, viz. that every man was at liberty to ransom himself, his arms and steed, for a hundred ducats; and one of the Italians, emptying, on the table, the bag containing the money they had brought, counted it out, and handed it over to the umpires. It was expected that the French would do the same; but seeing that no one came forward, Prospero Colonna said, as modestly as he could:

"Gentlemen, and *your* money?"

La Mothe advanced, and replied, smiling:

"Signor Prospero, you will see that will be sufficient."

The Roman baron grew indignant at this inopportune vaunt, but he controlled himself and only observed:

"The bear must be killed before its skin is sold! But no matter! although it was an express condition that the ransoms should be

brought, we will not, on that account, throw any obstacles in the way of the battle. . Gentlemen" (continued he, turning to his followers), "do you hear? This knight considers the result a foregone conclusion; it remains for you to disabuse him of his error."

Needless to say, this contemptuous behaviour made the Italians' blood boil; but, save by set teeth and flashing eyes, they made no response to either Signor Prospero or La Mothe.

These preliminaries settled, both parties were dismissed by the umpires, and given half an hour for preparation; after which a mounted trumpeter, stationed beside the judges, under the shade of the oaks, was to sound three blasts as a signal for assault.

As soon as they had returned to their chargers, and were settled in their saddles, they were arranged by their respective marshals in a line, at regular intervals of about four paces, and the curbs, girths, leathers and

buckles of the armour were again passed in review by Colonna, as well as Bayard, who, as keen and practised observers, were certainly unsurpassed in either army.

After this inspection, Signor Prospero pulled up his horse in the middle of the line, and said in a loud voice:

"Sirs! not a single word need I speak for the purpose of inciting you to quit yourselves like men! I see amongst you Lombards, Neapolitans, Romans, Sicilians. Are you not all equally sons of Italy? Will you not share equally the honours of victory? Are you not confronting strangers who proclaim Italians to be cowards? I have but one thing to say to you—do you see there, that vile traitor, Grajano d'Asti? He is fighting in an infamous cause! Do you understand me? . . . let him not leave the field alive!"

Fieramosca, who was beside Brancaleone, muttered to him: "Ah! if my hands were not tied by my vow!" And Brancaleone re-

plied: "Leave him to me! I am under no vow. I know how to settle him."

His wish to kill Grajano dated from the day when he listened to his friend's adventures, and saw that he might thus remove all impediment to the latter's union with Ginevra. Aware that Grajano was among the number of the French champions, he felt that his opportunity had come; and the reader will not have forgotten his investigations, on the day of the jousts, while the Astigian knight was arming himself outside the amphitheatre.

Since Ginevra's untimely end, his first inducement no longer existed; still he had not given up his purpose, and his anxiety to execute it was increased by this address of Signor Prospero, to whom, as head of the Colonna party, he yielded, in everything, implicit obedience.

Meantime, the two marshals had retired to their posts; Bayard near the umpires, and Colonna beneath the oaks. This latter, stern

and bold of aspect, bare-headed, but otherwise completely armed, mounted on a great black charger which was covered with a red caparison embroidered with gold, turned his face towards his followers, and waited, in silence, for the trumpet to sound. Near him stood his page, a fine youth of sixteen, dressed in blue, with carmine hose; and grouped around were several captains, whose different attitudes were, in spite of their immobility, expressive of a certain martial energy.

As the moment drew nigh, a deep hush prevailed. At the most, might have been heard an occasional whispered monosyllable; and this silence, which imparted an air of solemnity to the assembly, was only broken, now and then, by the pawing and neighing of the horses which, in consequence of want of work, and high feeding, were so fresh, that they would not keep steady in the ranks, but champed their long gold bits, bespattering them with foam, as they arched their necks and tails,

reared, and, with eyes all aflame, snorted through their distended nostrils.

It is difficult in our days to form an idea of the martial appearance of a man-at-arms of that period, panoplied, as he and his steed were, in steel. Each knight, with his vizor closed, armed cap-à-pie, his shield slung over his shoulder, and his lance in rest, bestrode a saddle, the iron bows of which, rising before and behind, fenced him in and rendered falling almost an impossibility; thus wedged in, pressure with the knees enabled him to stick so tight to his horse, that there seemed to exist between them the self-same unison of movement which prevailed in the dual nature of the centaur.

The horses' heads, in front and at the sides, were protected by steel head-pieces bored with holes for the eyes. In the centre of the forehead was a spike; the neck, shoulders, and chest were also protected by plates lapping over like scales, and jointed, so as to secure

freedom of motion; and armour, of similar contrivance, extended over the hind quarters and flanks, leaving only an uncovered space for the application of spurs. The fine points of these noble animals were so disguised by all this defensive gear, that, from their legs upwards, they resembled so many rhinoceroses. To see them standing still, no one would have believed it possible they could move, far less gallop; but a shake of the bridle and prick of the knight's heel found them as quick and handy as if they had been stripped; so cunningly were the joints of the armour articulated.

In addition to the lance, sword, and dagger worn by each man-at-arms on his person, he had in front, attached to the saddle-bow, a steel mace and axe. The Italians enjoyed the reputation of excelling with these weapons. The fashion, however, of mere adornment varied according to the caprice of each individual. On the crests of the helmets fluttered

feathers of various hues, mostly arranged round a long plume made out of a peacock's tail. Some, instead of feathers, had streamers of slashed stuff, which the French called *lambrequins*. Some wore surtouts, some shoulder-belts, while others, who possessed richly-wrought suits of armour, had no covering whatever over them. Even the horses had feathers, or some other ornament on their heads, and their bridles were festooned with brilliant colours; these were often of a hand's breadth, and of considerable value for their workmanship and rich ornamentation. Upon the shields, beside the coat of arms usually depicted on them, were inscribed mottoes suitable to the occasion; such, for example, as Fieramosca's "*Quid possit pateat saltem nunc Itala virtus.*"

At length, a herald advanced into the midst of the lists, and made proclamation in a loud voice, enjoining on all present to abstain from any display of party spirit, either by deed,

word, or gesture. As soon as he had withdrawn to his station, the trumpeter gave the first blast. He gave the second . . . a pin might have been heard drop. He gave the third, and the knights bending simultaneously over their horses' necks, and urging them on with spur and bridle, bounded forward, and with serried ranks swept on in rapid career, raising, respectively, as they clashed, shouts of "*Viva Italia!*" "*Vive la France!*" which might have been heard far away out at sea.

They had about a hundred and fifty paces to gallop before they met. The dust began to fly; it increased in density, completely hiding them from view, and enveloping them in a cloud as they closed, the horses' heads hurtling, and the cavaliers breaking their lances on the shields and cuirasses of their adversaries with a crash like a landslip which, thundering unchecked down a declivity, finally reaches a forest and plunges into it, burying, smashing, and uprooting everything it encounters.

The spectators were thus deprived of a sight of the first collision. In the pell-mell of men and horses nothing was to be seen save the glinting of weapons in the sunshine, and, here and there, shreds of plumes which, shorn off by the fury of the blows, drifted about for a time in the whirlwind of dust, and were finally wafted to a distance by the breeze. The tumult echoed through the neighbouring valleys. Don Garcia struck his thigh with his fist in admiration, and disgust at not being himself engaged in the fray; and this was the only manifestation of feeling among the transfixed and bewildered spectators.

For some seconds the two war-parties remained mixed up together; the constant flashes, which penetrated through the murky atmosphere, showing that the knights had now crossed swords. The clang of steel was audible, and the sound of continuous hammering, as though a score of anvils were at work. At the same time, this hurly-burly was replete

with vivid, lambent light like a display of fireworks when partly veiled by the smoke; so rapid and complex, on all sides, were the movements of the combatants, as they wheeled, closed and opened their ranks.

So intense was the anxiety to see something and know who were earning the first laurels, that an outburst seemed imminent; but the swelling murmurs were repressed no less by signals from the heralds, than by the appearance of a horse which extricated itself from the melée, so smothered with dust that it was impossible to distinguish the colour of its trappings. Scouring round the lists, it dragged between its legs the half-severed reins, and, catching in them first one foot and then the other, it gave the bit such jerks, that it could hardly keep from falling. Its track was marked by a stream of dark blood flowing from a large wound behind the shoulder; after a short course, it stumbled exhausted on to its knees, and rolled over on the ground. It was

then recognised as belonging to the French party.

In the meantime, the men-at-arms, singling one another out, fought hand to hand, and in couples, giving and parrying redoubtable buffets; and as they wheeled round one another to seize any point of vantage, the serried mass of the first onslaught became dispersed over a larger area. The dust, carried away by the wind, no longer concealed the combatants, and it was then seen that the unhorsed man-at-arms was Martellin de Lambris. Unfortunately for him, his opponent was Fanfulla, who with his usual mad impetuosity, beneath which exterior lay real courage and dexterity, smote the vizor so full with his lance, that he made the Frenchman measure his length on the hard ground; while, in the act of making this splendid stroke, he raised his voice so that it was heard above all the din: "That 's one!" Then observing that La Mothe (who had just lost a stirrup in his passage with Fieramosca)

was close at hand, he went on, "The money will *not* be enough! the money 's too little!" . . . And as the tide of battle ebbed away from them, he said to the vanquished knight, "You are my prisoner!" . . . But the other, having regained his feet, responded with a thrust which glanced off Fanfulla's polished cuirass ; in less than a second, the latter's sword, wielded with both hands, had fallen on the helm of his antagonist who, staggered by the first blow, could hardly keep his feet. Fanfulla delivered another, and another, crying out each time: "The money's too little . . . too little . . . too little." . . . And in the exertion of dealing the blows, he jerked out his words with the emphatic grunt which a wood-cutter gives as an accompaniment to each stroke of his axe.

The Frenchman, in spite of all his efforts, could not stand against the tempest, and came to the ground, half-stunned. Nevertheless, he would not hear of surrender; so Fanfulla, ex-

asperated, gave him his *coup-de-grace*, saying, as he extended him senseless on the ground: "Now are you satisfied?"

Bayard, who saw that he was courting death to no purpose, despatched a man-at-arms, who threw down his truncheon between the two warriors, and proclaimed aloud: "Martellin de Lambris, prisoner!" Some men ran up, assisted him to rise, and, supporting him between them, presented him to Signor Prospero.

The conqueror was received by Colonna with an effusive "Well done!" and the French baron was given over in charge to the sergeants. He refused to allow his casque to be removed, and threw himself down under an oak, where he remained mute and motionless.

Fanfulla turned his horse round, started off in a canter to return to the battle, and looked about to see where he could be of most use; all the while sportively executing in the air, with his sword, a series of *moulinets*, at which exercise he was the most skilful and expert hand

in the army. Taking a general survey of the field, he saw that fortune was in nowise inclining towards the foe, and that the Italian men-at-arms were doing their duty nobly. Then calling on La Mothe by name, he again raised the cry of "Too little money!" and these three words he set to the tune of a popular ditty which used to be sung about the streets by the blind. His careless and eccentric style of riding, these wonderful feats of fencing, all done as though in fun, combined with the tone of his voice, had the effect of imparting such an air of absurdity to the refrain, that even the muscles of Signor Prospero's serious face relaxed for an instant into a smile.

During the time taken up in achieving this first victory, Fieramosca had, certainly, carried away one of La Mothe's stirrups, but he had not succeeded in unhorsing him. He was of very superior strength and valour to Fanfulla's prisoner. Fieramosca, jealous of the honour

that knight had just achieved, wielded his sword so vigorously, that the scorner of Italians, adept as he was, found it no easy matter to hold his ground. The insulting remarks made by him the night of the supper (when he declared that a French man-at-arms would disdain to have an Italian as groom) recurred to Fieramosca's mind; and while he repeated thrusts and cleaving blows, shivering and forcing the joints of his enemy's armour, and occasionally wounding him, he shouted derisively:

"At any rate we know how to use the curry comb! Look out for yourself! Now is the time for deeds and not words!"

Goaded by the taunt, La Mothe delivered such a furious blow on his head, that Ettore, unable to oppose his shield in time, tried to ward it off with his sword; but it gave way, and flew into splinters, while La Mothe's, falling on the collar of his breastplate, cut clean through it, and wounded him in the shoulder a little above the collar-bone. Fieramosca did

not wait to receive a second blow; he stooped down, clasped hold of the Frenchman and tried to drag him off. The other, dropping his suspended sword, endeavoured to free himself. This was exactly what Fieramosca wanted. Letting go, before he had time to resume the sword, he gave his horse a dig with the spurs and made him bound on one side; this gave him time to detach the battle-axe which hung from the saddle-bow, and with which he turned on his adversary.

Fieramosca's good steed, trained in all the accomplishments of the *manège*, admonished by a slight touch of the spur and bridle, began to curvet like a ram about to butt, and make forward plunges, without ever carrying its master beyond range of his foe. It performed its part with such intelligence, that Ettore could not help saying to himself, "I did well to bring you with me!" and forthwith, he wielded his axe to such purpose, that he regained over La Mothe the advantage he had lost.

The struggle between these antagonists, who might be said to be the élite of both sides, if it did not decide the fate of the day, would, at any rate, almost apportion the honours of it. Twofold would be La Mothe's disgrace if he were to suffer defeat after his expressions of contempt for his foe. Twofold would be Fieramosca's glory if he were to gain the victory. His comrades, aware that he was quite equal to the occasion, refrained from interference; while the French, also, abstained from backing up their champion, for fear it should be said that, after so many vaunts, he was incompetent to hold his own against a single opponent.

On this account, almost unconsciously, all the rest left off fighting for some minutes and became absorbed in watching the two warriors who, for the reasons to which we have already adverted, were inspired with an incredible sense of obligation to win; and they fought with such fury, such attention to avoid mis-

takes, such alertness to profit by any slight advantage, that the conflict between them might be pronounced a model of the art of chivalry.

Don Garcia di Paredes, whose life had been spent amid feats of arms, struck, however, with admiration at this masterly display, unable to keep quiet at the barriers, had risen, betaken himself to the highest point of the mound which commanded a view over the lists, and there stood looking on with the greatest eagerness. Viewed from a distance, his gigantic bust, poised on two herculean limbs, with his arms hanging straight down, appeared as immovable as a statue; but the contraction of the muscles under his close-fitting leathern vest, his clenched fists, and above all his sparkling eyes betrayed, to the bystanders, his excitement as well as disgust at being unable to take any other part than that of spectator.

The considerations which withheld others

from joining in the fray either did not occur to, or else were disregarded by Fanfulla, who, after leaving Signor Prospero, went careering about the lists. Pricking his horse, and brandishing his sword, he bore down against La Mothe. Ettore saw him and shouted, "Back!" but as this had not the desired effect, he pushed his horse across the Lodigian's, and, with scant courtesy, gave him, with the butt end of the axe, a backhander on the chest, which made him pull up.

"I am quite enough, and too much for him as it is!" he exclaimed, indignantly.

This courtesy towards La Mothe was applauded by all except Fanfulla who, breaking forth into sundry untranslateable Italian imprecations, rejoined, half in anger and half in joke: "You carry your tongue in your hand!" Thereupon he turned round, laid about him like a madman, and threw all the enemy into disorder, without attacking any one in particular. The momentary inaction being thus brought

to an end, the battle began to rage again more hotly than ever.

From the outset, Brancaleone, confirmed in his purpose, had singled out Grajano d'Asti and broken a lance with him, fortune favouring both equally. Then measuring swords together, they still fought without any very decided advantage on either side. Brancaleone was, perhaps, his antagonist's superior in skill and robustness, but the Piedmontese was a noted fencer, and anyone, acquainted with the noble science of self-defence, knows in what good stead that accomplishment would stand him.

Between the other conflicting couples, victory everywhere hung in the balance; and though the contest had not lasted longer than an hour and a half, so hot and obstinate had it been, that it was evident both men and horses stood in need of an interval of rest. Accordingly, by common consent of the umpires, the trumpeter sounded the signal, and the

men-at-arms advanced into the midst and separated the combatants.

Instantly there arose, among the crowd surrounding the lists, a buzz of voices such as follows at once on the fall of the curtain in our theatres, after a play which has absorbed the attention of the audience. The knights returned to their former order of array and alighted. Some removed their casques to cool and wipe away the moisture from their foreheads; others, who found the harness or trappings of their horses in any way injured, applied themselves to repair the damage. The horses, shaking their heads and distending their jaws, sought relief from the pain inflicted by the chafing of the curbs. Feeling their saddles empty, they planted themselves firmly on all four legs, and gave themselves a hearty shake which made their armour rattle again. Once more, with refreshed lungs, the itinerant vendors raised their cries; and the two marshals rode forwards to rejoin their respective warriors.

On the score of one of the Frenchmen having been made prisoner, and almost all the others more or less knocked about or wounded, it was generally considered that the Italians had, so far, the best of it; and amongst the many who had betted on one side or the other, those who were held to be the best judges began to frown and look doubtful. The good Bayard had too much experience in matters of the kind, not to discern that his party's prospects had taken a turn for the worse. However, he tried to keep this suspicion to himself, and proceeded to encourage and marshal them; reminding each one of the rules of the art of chivalry, of the *coups* that might be assayed, and of the most approved defensive tactics.

Prospero Colonna, finding that his party, having sustained less damage than the enemy, stood in less need of rest, after the lapse of half an hour, demanded a resumption of hostilities, and the umpires accordingly gave the

signal. The horses, in spite of their still heaving flanks, urged on by the spur, reared their crests anew, and dashed forwards hurtling together. A few minutes would now suffice to decide the victory. The silence, and breathless interest of the bystanders increased, in proportion to the rage and fury of the combatants. The gauds, feathers, and decorations had all flown away in shreds, or were stained with blood and dust. Fieramosca's blue shoulder-belt, slashed in twain, hung dangling from his side, and his helm was dented and shorn of all ornament; but though slightly wounded in the neck, he was otherwise tolerably fresh, and pressed hard on La Mothe with whom he had again closed. Fanfulla was pitted against Jacques de Guignes. Again did Brancaleone engage Grajano, ever keeping a look-out for an opportunity of dealing him a blow on the casque; and the rest of their company was dispersed about the lists, fighting, hand to hand, with the French, for the

most part using the axe with the greatest effect.

All at once, a shout rose among the spectators. All, even the combatants, turned to ascertain the cause, and perceived there was an end to the contest between Grajano and Brancaleone. The former, bowed down over his horse's neck, with cloven helm and skull, was losing bucketsfull of blood that gushed through the holes of his vizor, flowing over his armour, and down the legs of his charger which stood stamping into the ground crimson impressions of its hoofs. At length he toppled over on to the ground, with a clank like a bag full of metal. Brancaleone raised his dripping axe, brandishing it above his head, as he cried out in an exultant and terrible voice:

"Long live Italy! So perish all traitors and renegades!"

Then defiantly he bore down on the foes which still continued to stand their ground. But the conflict did not last long. Grajano's

fall seemed to turn the scales. Fieramosca, enraged at La Mothe's long and obstinate defence, dealt his blows so fast and furiously, that he confused and disconcerted him; and in the end, his shield gone, his sword broken, his armour shattered and unriveted, La Mothe received on his neck, from the axe, such a tremendous blow, that he crouched down, stunned and blinded, over the saddle-bow.

Before he could recover himself, Fieramosca, who was on his right, flinging his own shield behind his shoulder, grasped with his left hand the straps which act as a support, over the shoulder, to the breastplate, and with a grip of his knees gave spurs to his horse, which bounded forwards, and so the French knight was violently dragged out of the saddle. As soon as he was on the ground, Fieramosca, who, at the right moment, had jumped off his horse, stood over him with his dagger unsheathed, and pointing it to his face, so that it just grazed his forehead, shouted, "Sur-

render, or die!" The baron, still stupified, made no answer. This silence might have cost him his life. Bayard saved it, by proclaiming him a prisoner.

Leaving La Mothe to be conveyed away by his attendants and handed over to Signor Prospero, Fieramosca turned round to remount; but lo! his horse had disappeared. He glanced round the battle-field and saw that Giraud de Forses, having had his own charger killed, had taken the Italian's, and with the remnant of his *confrères* was still making head against the adverse party. Ettore was well aware that, singly and on foot, he had no chance of recovering his steed. He had reared it, fed it out of his hand, and accustomed it to follow his voice; so he kept cool. Approaching as near as he could, he began calling it and stamping on the ground, as he always used to do when he wanted to give it corn. The horse, at the signal, started off towards him, and as the knight tried to hold it in, it first began to rear,

then to plunge, and, resisting all attempts at control, carried him *nolens volens* into the midst of the Italians, who surrounded and took him prisoner without a blow. As he, cursing his luck, dismounted from the horse, Fieramosca instantly sprang upon it, and handing back to him, by the point, the sword of which he had been dispossessed, said to him :

"Here, brother! take your arms and go back to your own side, for we take our prisoners by force of arms, and not by enchanter's arts."

The Frenchman, who expected a different sort of reception, stood still in astonishment. He thought for a moment, then answered :

"If I do not surrender to your arms, I do to your courtesy."

And taking his sword by the middle of the blade, he went and laid it on the ground before Signor Prospero; whereat, all who commended Fieramosca's generous act, admitted that the Frenchman also had done and spoken well

and wisely. On this account, he was the only one who was afterwards dismissed without payment of ransom.

The French were weakened by the loss of four of their best swordsmen, while the Italians still had their full complement of thirteen horsemen, and it was easy to foresee how the day would end. Notwithstanding this, the unhorsed Frenchmen, five in number, closed up, while the four who still kept their seats ranged themselves two on either side, and in this array prepared to make head against the Italians who, renewing the assault for the third time, made an impetuous and simultaneous onslaught. No one, for an instant, imagined that there was the least possibility of these brave fellows holding their ground; nevertheless, in admiration of their skill and tenacity, the lookers-on became more than ever filled with anxious expectation as to the result of this last manœuvre; and some even deplored that their valour should, at the hazard of their

lives, be proved against such overwhelming odds. But the French themselves were nowise daunted. Bruised, wounded, begrimed with blood and dust, they still showed a bold front; and a grand sight it was, to see them proudly awaiting the brunt of the cavalry charge which seemed as though it must crush them into powder.

The Italians, at last, started off, but not with their former *élan*, for the horses were almost done up, and many of them had their mouths besmeared with bloody foam, from violent tugging at the curbs; so that the knights could only goad them, with their spurs, into a heavy, pounding trot, as they raised, louder than ever, the cry of "Long live Italy!" In defiance of the laws promulgated at the beginning, such was the intense curiosity with which the spectators became possessed, that the circle, formed by them, gradually became contracted. The guards who were charged with the maintenance of order, even more

excited than the others, also followed that concentric movement. The same sort of scene may be witnessed any day in bull-baiting. At first, everyone stands still in his proper place; but at length, one dog catches hold of the bull's ear; then another hangs on; and when, finally, they have brought it to bay, then farewell to all order! no one is any longer amenable to authority; shouts and uproar increase, and all press forward to obtain a better view.

Fieramosca, as having the best horse, took up his position in the centre of the line formed anew by the Italians; and on either side of him were ranged those whose steeds were the least exhausted, and fittest to gallop. Thus, in sweeping down on the foe, the centre projected forwards in the shape of a wedge, of which Ettore formed the edge. This order was so well kept, that, on coming to close quarters, the French ranks were irretrievably broken. Then ensued a fresh hand-to-hand conflict

more terrible than ever. To the skill, valour and numbers of the Italians were opposed superhuman efforts, desperation, and frenzy at the prospect of imminent and inevitable dishonour. The unlucky and intrepid French, amidst a tornado of dust, fell bleeding under the horses' hoofs; rose again, clutching at the stirrups and bridles of their conquerors; fell again, thrust down, battered, trodden on, rolling over and over; their armour fractured, half-disarmed, yet still struggling to recover themselves; picking up off the ground bits of wood, shafts of lances, and even stones, to ward off the evil moment of discomfiture.

Ettore was the first to shout out an exhortation to them to throw up the game, and surrender themselves prisoners; but possibly, his voice was inaudible in the tumult; or if heard, by their actions they gave a tacit refusal; and though with strength flagging under these terrible buffets, drunk with fury, they con-

tinued their marvellous resistance. Of the four who were still in their saddles at the beginning of the last encounter, one had had a fall and was defending himself on foot; two had had their horses killed under them; the fourth had been taken prisoner. Passing description were all the strange incidents, feats of arms, and desperate deeds of that supreme crisis, which left on the minds of all beholders an indelible impression of horror and admiration.

De Liaye, for example, was seen to grasp Capoccio Romano's curb with both hands, and try to wrench it out, or break the bridle. The horse pawed him under, but could not shake him off. In this guise he was dragged round the lists into Signor Prospero's presence; and so desperate was he, that it tasked the strength of more men than one to force open his hands and place him among the prisoners.

At length, the Italians themselves began to look upon a continuance of the strife as sheer

cruelty, and one and all stayed their hands, and took up Ettore's cry of "Prisoners! . . . prisoners!"

A murmuring arose outside; it spread, and despite the herald's opposition, there began a chorus of hooting and yelling, the mob insisting that an end should be put to the fray, and that the Frenchmen's lives should be spared. The crowd broke through the bounds, and pressed round the combatants (now hemmed in by a circle of about thirty or forty paces in diameter), some shouting, waving handkerchiefs and caps, hoping thus to part the antagonists; others appealing to the umpires and marshals of the lists. Signor Prospero, forcing his way through, raised both voice and staff to induce the French to give in. Even Bayard, though grieved to the soul at the overthrow of his party, conscious of the futility of a longer struggle, and deeming it a sin thus to lavish the blood and lives of such heroes, pushed forwards and called on them to desist

and yield themselves prisoners. But the vanquished heeded neither his voice nor that of others; they had almost lost the semblance of men, and rather wore the appearance of unchained demons. At last, the umpires also descended from the tribunals. They entered the circle, had the trumpets sounded, and the Italians loudly proclaimed victors. The latter then wished to retire, but in vain; rage, grief, and wounds had maddened their rivals to such a point that they no longer heard nor understood anything, but continued to struggle with their foe like tigers constricted in the coils of a python.

Don Garcia, finally, seeing that there was nothing else to be done, leaped on the back of Facet de Jacet (who, scuffling with Brancaleone, was trying to snatch his axe from his hands, while the latter hesitated about dealing him a blow which would certainly have given him his quietus), embraced him with his almost superhuman strength, and dragged him, in

spite of his teeth, out of the fray. This example was imitated by several lookers-on. In a moment they surrounded and sprang on the combatants, and though they got rather knocked about and had their clothes torn, they succeeded, after considerable hauling and difficulty, in removing the five or six mutilated knights ; and though they continued to struggle and foam with rage, they were, in the end, dragged under the oaks among the other prisoners.

Fieramosca's first care, as soon as the battle was over, was to jump off his horse and run to Grajano d'Asti, who was lying prostrate on the spot where he had fallen. When Brancaleone made that splendid stroke, Ettore's generous heart had been unable to repress a thrill of joy; but a noble and virtuous sentiment strangled it at its birth. He went up, waved off the people who crowded round, and knelt down beside him.

The blood was still slowly oozing from the

gaping wound and coagulating. He lifted his rival's head very gently and proceeded to relieve him of his casque with such tenderness, that it might have been supposed his dearest friend's life was at stake.

But the axe had split the skull and penetrated deep into the brain: the knight was dead. Ettore, with a profound sigh, laid the dead warrior's head down again on the ground, rose, and said to his comrades, who had likewise drawn near to look on, but more especially addressing Brancaleone and pointing to the still dripping axe which the latter held in his hand:

"That weapon of yours has to-day accomplished a great act of justice. But how can we rejoice over such a victory? Is not the gore which drenches the soil Italian blood? And ought not he, strong and valiant in war, to have shed his, to our glory and his own, against the common foe? Grajano's tomb would then have been revered and glorious,

and his memory an honourable example. Instead of which he lies branded with infamy, and on his ashes will rest a malediction the meed of a traitor!"

Thoughtfully and silently they all returned to their horses. The body was that evening conveyed to Barletta, but when he was to have been buried in holy ground, the populace rose and interfered. The grave-diggers carried the corpse to the ford of a torrent, two miles outside the town, dug a grave, and buried him there. That spot was thenceforth called *The Traitor's Pass.*

Signor Prospero, before moving off from the lists, turned to Bayard and asked if he wished to disburse his party's ransom. La Mothe's vaunt was thus discounted by Bayard, who made no answer; and the umpires decreed that the captives should follow their conquerors to Barletta. They wended their way on foot, mute, bewildered, and surrounded by an immense crowd, while the Italians followed them

on horseback, to strains of music and acclamations of "Long live Italy! long live Colonna!"

On reaching the Castle, the thirteen warriors presented the twelve prisoners to Consalvo, who was awaiting them in the hall surrounded by his barons. The great Captain, after bestowing much praise on the victors, turned to the French, and addressed them as follows:

"Far be it from me to insult brave men in their misfortunes! Fortune is fickle, and the vanquished to-day may be the victors to-morrow. I shall not bid you to respect henceforth Italian valour; after such deeds, any words of mine would be superfluous. I charge you, however, to learn to honour valour and intrepidity *wherever* you find it. Remember, God has shared it among mankind, and not given your nation a special monopoly of it; and that modesty is an ornament to real courage, whereas bragging is but a blemish to it."

Dismissing them with these remarks, they all left the hall together, and so terminated this glorious day.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

"Thy destined lord is come too late;
He sees not—ne'er shall see—thy face!"

The Corsair.

"That heart hath burst, that eye was closed;
Yea, closed before his own."

Bride of Abydos.

All those who narrate or write a story, do so, we are certain, in the fond hope that it will afford pleasure, and that someone will be found to listen to, or read it to the end. We acknowledge to have cherished, in a secret corner of our heart, this said hope, which sometimes

flared up like the flame of a candle exposed to a draught (the reader may well smile), and at other times flickered so faintly that it seemed on the point of being utterly quenched; but self-conceit has hitherto carried the day.

If this subtle adulator has not misled us, if really a reader has been found endowed with sufficient patience to accompany us up to this point, we may lay the flattering unction to our soul that he will be glad to hear something more about Fieramosca; and we will, willingly, tell him all we have been able to glean on the subject.

When Consalvo had dismissed the victors and prisoners, the latter were received and well entertained in Colonna's house, where they slept that night; and the next day, as soon as the ransoms were brought from the French camp, they were set at liberty and escorted, by not a few, beyond the city gate, with all the demonstrations of honour due to their valiant defence.

But Fieramosca, as soon as he quitted the great Captain's presence, took no further heed of them. At last he was at liberty to think of Ginevra and himself; so he quietly gave his comrades the slip. They went off amidst a throng of friends, and were too intoxicated with joy at their victory to think of anything else, or pay any attention to his movements. At the far end of one of the arcades in the court he espied Vittoria Colonna, who, after being present at Consalvo's reception of the thirteen warriors, was returning and about to enter her chamber; so he set off running, and, calling her by name, obliged her to turn round and stop. She guessed what he was about to ask, as some of his misadventures had come to her ears.

"Ah me!" thought she; "what answer shall I give him?"

But she had no time to reflect, for he was already by her side. His armour was covered with dust, and dented here and there from the

effect of blows. One broken feather dangled on his helmet; of the others, nothing but the stumps remained. His uplifted vizor displayed his fine features, bedewed with perspiration, sharpened by fatigue, and beaming with joy at the victory and with eagerness to find Ginevra, whom since Grajano's death he could at last call his own.

As it is natural to the human heart to hope or fear according to the circumstances of the time being, so Ettore's discouragement, or, I might almost say, state of desperation about Ginevra the previous night and morning, had now (as a result of the moral and physical shock he had sustained in fighting, combined with the ineffable joy of having gained the day) been converted into a confident hope of finding her safe and sound.

"Madonna!" gasped he, breathing fast from the beating of his heart. "God bless and reward you! I know all about it . . . that you received her and have done so much for

her . . . poor thing! . . . she stood in need of it! Take me to her; for heaven's sake let us go to her. . . ."

Every word uttered by the young man was a stab in Vittoria's heart, and she could not summon up courage to tell him the sorrowful news; but with an effort, she composed her face into a sort of half-smile, and answered:

"Ginevra has gone back to Santa Orsola."

This was only too true, as about half an hour before the return of the Italians from the field she had been borne to the Convent, attended by Fra Mariano, and was to be buried that night.

"At Santa Orsola! What, so soon? Then there has been nothing the matter with her? then she is all right?

"Yes; she is all right."

Fieramosca opened his arms (so full was he of joy) as though about to embrace Vittoria, but dropped instead on one knee, seized her hand, and imprinted on it kisses of gratitude

which were worth more than a thousand protestations. Then he rose as though beside himself, and without another word, started off running towards Santa Orsola; but he suddenly stopped, glanced at his bosom, and turned back.

"You see, lady," said he, smiling with a certain amount of trepidation; "you see this shoulder-belt? she gave it me. . . . To-day it has been severed by a sword-cut." So saying, he unfastened the knot with which he had tied the two ends together to prevent it falling off. "I know I am too bold; but would it be troubling you very much to ask you, as a great favour, to mend it so that Ginevra may not see that it is cut? Poor thing! she would look upon it as a bad omen . . . she would say: 'Could you not have covered it with your shield?'"

Vittoria gladly went to her room to fetch what was necessary, thankful for an opportunity of concealing from the young man's

observation her emotion at the sight of his unsuspecting confidence. She returned more self-possessed, and set to work to repair the shoulder-belt, holding her head down so that Fieramosca might not notice that there was anything wrong.

"One can hardly tell the colour of it," he said, smiling, while she worked. "Many are the adventures it has been in! It will now be my companion in *good* as it has hitherto been in *bad* fortune. . . . You don't know how many years I have constantly worn it. . . . I have saved it in many a battle . . . and to-day! when all my troubles are turned into joy . . . . they have just gone and spoilt it! What would those say who believe in omens?"

Vittoria went on sewing, and answered not a word. Her heart wrung with the necessity of acquainting him with the truth, yet shrinking with invincible repugnance from inflicting such grief upon him, she thought the best way of meeting the difficulty would be to seek

Brancaleone as soon as Ettore had departed, and adjure him to support his friend under this terrible trial.

"Thank you a thousand times," said Ettore when the work was finished; and off he flew down the grand staircase, and reached the courtyard in a twinkling. No one was there but Masuccio holding the horse's bridle. The poor beast was in a regular lather, with drooping crest, lack-lustre eye, and heaving flanks.

"To the stable! to the stable!" shouted Ettore, as he passed by; "when will you learn sense? The idea of keeping a smoking horse out in the cold!"

And on he went towards the port, for the shortest way to Santa Orsola was by sea.

On reaching the boat-stand there was not a boat to be found. The ships with the Spanish troops on board had cast anchor in the port, and as Consalvo wished to land them all before nightfall, he had sequestered all the boats for this service.

Ettore stamped with impatience, then exclaimed:

"I will ride. It is rather longer, but it can't be helped."

He rushed off to the stable. Masuccio was on the point of taking off Airone's bridle.

"Leave it on!" said Fieramosca.

He took it out of his hands, threw it over the horse's neck, leaped into the saddle, and in a few minutes was clear of the town, on the road along the coast leading to the Convent.

"Poor Airone!" quoth he, patting its neck while with his heel he urged it on into an unwilling trot, his good steed thinking it very hard to be done out of its stall after such a hard day's work; "you are quite in the right; but patience for a little longer, and I will make you amends for all."

Night, meanwhile, was fast approaching. The sun had set half an hour previously. As Fieramosca rode towards the east, the sky

behind him was cloudless and serene; but before him it was overcast with heavy black clouds massed along the horizon. These might be seen discharging sheets of rain, more or less dense, over the sea-line; while the tops of those tiers of clouds which covered half the heavens, catching a shimmer of the twilight, were faintly capped with silver. All this while the darkness was lit up by quivering flashes of lightning, accompanied by the distant rumble of thunder. The sea was rough and threatening, with a heavy swell; black as pitch, except where the waves were crested with white foam. On the strand, the gradually rising tide was fringed by a narrow belt of green, transparent surf. Onward it rolled, like a wall of glass, till it reached its extreme boundary, when it ebbed, and burst with a roar, drenching the sand with spray.

The gloomy appearance of the weather, however, at that moment, in nowise affected the young Italian's felicity; impatiently he mea-

sured with his eyes the tract of road which lay between him and Santa Orsola; and the beach being flat and open he could see the whole way. He imagined the transport of his first meeting with Ginevra; he pictured to himself her coming forward to greet him with her frank gaze and light, graceful gait. He hoped he should arrive in time to be the first to give her tidings of the victory; and his only concern was considering what would be the most proper way of giving her to understand that henceforth she was at liberty to dispose of his hand.

When almost within gunshot of the tower, the cutting east wind, which smote upon his cheek, had brought up the storm; driving before it, as harbingers of its progress, heavy drops which splashed off his breastplate, and ere long gave way to a fine thick downpour of rain. To this succeeded a clap of thunder which seemed to let loose the floodgates of heaven; and then commenced a perfect deluge

which drenched him from head to foot, though he was only a few steps away from the tower. The gate was still open. He passed rapidly through, and quickly reached the island and the strangers' quarters. Tying his horse up to a grating under shelter, in four bounds he was in Ginevra's apartments.

Useless to say, he found them empty. He went down again, and his first thought was to look for her in the church; he knew that she generally went to pray in a small raised choir. As soon as he entered he glanced up at it. It was empty. The church was empty and almost dark; empty also was the part of the choir which was in sight, though he heard a muffled sound of chanting as if proceeding from underground. He walked forward, and noticed that from the aperture in front of the high altar, which corresponded with the subterranean chapel, there issued a ray which traced a faint ring of light on the vault. When he came close up to it, he heard that prayers

were being recited below. He passed behind the altar and descended. The jingling of his armour, spurs, and sword against the steps, made those who were standing in a circle, attending the function, turn round and make way for him. At his feet was the bier he had seen that same morning in the church of San Domenico. Facing him, beside the altar, stood Fra Mariano in his rochet and funeral stole, with uplifted arm holding the holy-water brush. In the midst appeared an open tomb. On one side, two men supporting the grave-stone; on the other, Zoraide on her knees, bowed down over Ginevra's body which lay within, and sobbing as she arranged the veil round her face, and placed a chaplet of white roses on her brow.

Ettore, on reaching the bottom, took it all in; stood dumbfounded and transfixed, made not a gesture, moved not a muscle; his face became drawn, pale as death, his lips trembled convulsively, and cold dews stood on his forehead.

Zoraide's sobs redoubled, and Fra Mariano mastered his emotion sufficiently to say in an unsteady voice, which showed how his heart bled for the unhappy youth :

"Yesterday her soul fled to heaven. God is making her happier than she would have been amongst us. . . ." But here the good friar broke off, his voice becoming choked with tears.

The slab was rolled back with iron levers over the open tomb, slipped into the grooves, fell, and closed it up. Ettore remained rooted to the spot. Fra Mariano approached, took his hand which was yielded to him unresistingly, embraced him, turned round to lead him away, and Ettore submitted. They went up the steps and out of the church. The thunder and lightning continued, and the rain fell in torrents. When they were close to the strangers' quarters, Fieramosca shook off the friar's arm; and before the latter could utter a word, was already in the saddle, stooping down over his

horse's neck and digging his rowels into its flanks. Away it galloped, and the gateway resounded with the clatter of its hoofs.

Never again was Fieramosca seen, alive or dead, either by his friends or any of his generation.

Various were the conjectures formed as to his fate ; all, however, vague and unworthy of credit. One alone bore the least impress of likelihood, and was as follows :—

Some poor mountaineers of Gargano, who were employed as charcoal-burners, related to other peasants (and so, travelling from mouth to mouth, the report in course of time reached Barletta after the Spanish camp had been broken up), that on the night of a great storm, there had appeared to them a strange vision of an armed knight on horseback, on the summit of some inaccessible rocks overhanging a precipice from which there was a perpendicular fall into the sea.

At first a few, then many, and in the end

everybody, said and firmly believed that it was the archangel Michael.

When, however, Fra Mariano heard of it and compared dates, he thought it was more likely to be Ettore who, in a state of frenzy, might have urged on his steed into dangerous places, and at last have fallen with it into some unexplored chasm, or even into the sea.

In the year 1616, the sea having receded, leaving a sandbank exposed below Gargano, a fisherman discovered, wedged in between two rocks, a mass of iron almost entirely eaten away by rust and sea-salt. Within were found human bones and the skeleton of a horse.

Now let the reader form his own conclusions, for our story is finished.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY W. H. ALLEN AND CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE.